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ABSTRACT

This book compiles testimonies of the struggles, everyday life, and accomplishments of Indian women from Central and South America. Following an introduction to the increasing role of Indian women in international forums and indigenous organizations, the words of individual women describe the problems that affect them and their determination to overcome such difficulties. Testimonies discuss physical and sexual abuse of children; the imposition of machismo on indigenous cultures by European invaders; a maternal and infant health project in the Peruvian Amazon; the need for an indigenous curriculum that allows mothers to be involved in their children's education; precontact roles of indigenous men and women; mothers as teachers of culture and spiritual ways; revival of spiritual traditions; goals of international meetings related to indigenous women's human rights, bilingual and intercultural education, and self-determination; religious freedom; self-directed community development; connection to the land and Pachamama (Mother Earth); pollution and ecological disequilibrium caused by development projects; need for training in leadership and organizational skills; political participation and social action; illiteracy; infant mortality; migration to the cities; seminars and workshops for consciousness raising and networking; marketing traditional crafts; and development of a hostel for indigenous secondary students. The final chapter lists 85 indigenous women's organizations and key contacts around the world. Includes many photographs. (SV)

Women's Committee of the South and Meso-American Indian Information Center

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DAUGHTERS OF ABYA YALA

Indigenous Women Regaining Control

RC 020667

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Daughters of Abya Yala

Native Women Regaining Control

Edited by
Wara Alderete, Gina Pacaldo, Xihuanel Huerta,
and Lucilene Whitesell

A production of
The South and Meso-American
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"Abya Yala" refers to South and Meso-America as "the continent of life" in the language of the Kuna people of Panama and Colombia.

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Quichua girl

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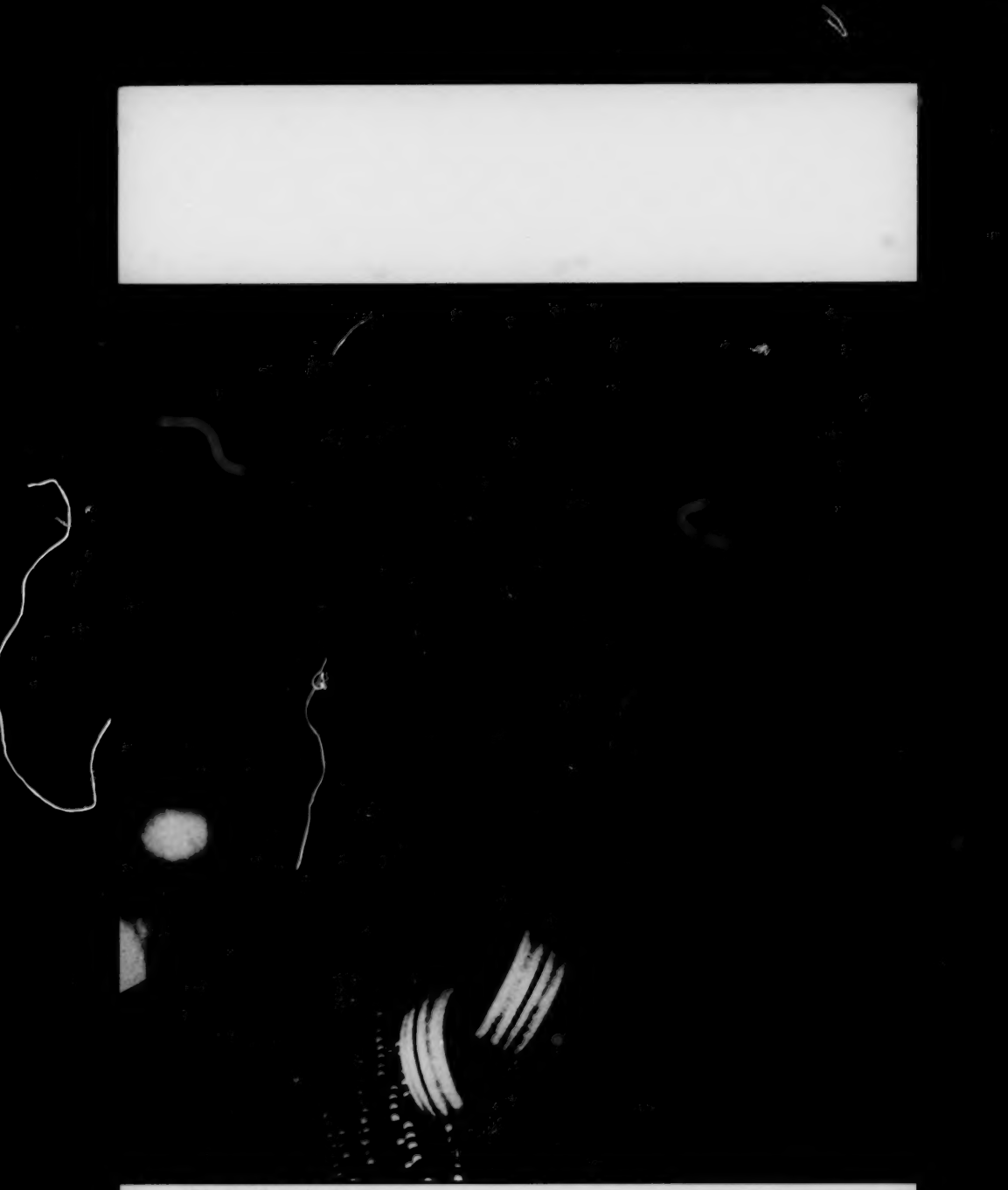

Woman from the Amazon AGUIRRE/SWITKES/AMAZONIA

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A Message to Indian Women

Dear Sisters,

We Indian women of South and Central America gathered in Lima, Peru on March 25th to the 27th of 1991 with the goal of reflecting on the situation of the Indian Peoples of our continent. We want to share with you this experience so we can strengthen our struggles as Indigenous women.

This gathering has allowed us to reaffirm our commitment and solidarity to be united and confront together the problems that have afflicted our people for centuries; it is for this reason that we will continue working to establish closer links of communication among Indian Women of the world.

We call to all the Indian women to build an alliance to struggle for the right of our people for self-determination.

During this meeting, the participants have come together to form the South and Central American Indian Women's Coordinating Body.

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"We are the caretakers of the earth"

"After the 500th anniversary of the invasion of our land, it is time for us, the Indigenous women of South and Meso-America, to increase our participation in decisions affecting our communities. Until now, we have found ourselves isolated from the means of communication, support networks, and resources which could allow us to take part in continental campaigns of unity and organization.

GUILLERMO DELGADO/SAIC

Quechua women at a meeting

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We struggle side by side with our *compañeros*, and our children and elders. We are the main bread winners for our families. We make crafts, labor in the fields, and are exploited as maids in the cities. We are the caretakers of the earth, and of the traditions and culture of our people. We are at the forefront of every mobilization in our communities, whether it be to protest violations of our human rights or expropriation of our land. The presence of Indian women in Indigenous organizations is fundamental, since we provide organizational, administrative, and technical support. But, how many women are there in the directive bodies of Indian organizations? Very few. Decision making is reserved for men, while Indian women are still relegated to providing services, if allowed to participate at all.

Beyond 1992

As preparations for the 1992 activities were increased, we women initiated a series of activities to promote our organization and our effective participation in the decision-making process at the local, national, and international levels. In 1990, the South and Meso-American Indian Information Center's Women's Program was established and steered by women Board Members. We launched fund-raising campaigns to ensure the equal participation of women in the Continental Meeting of Indigenous Peoples "500 Years of Indian Resistance" held in Quito, Ecuador, July 1990. The meeting approved the resolutions of the Women's Commission, which declared: "the invasion of non-Indian values has drastically changed the relationship between men and women and the role that women play in the communities and nations. We are victims of an oppressive system which brings violence and addictions to our communities. We need to reestablish our Indian identity so men

and women can live and work together in harmony again. From now on, we will work at the continental level, in a coordinated manner, and we will actively participate in local, national, and international meetings."

Indian women from South and Central America participated in the Second International Conference of Indigenous Women, held in August 1990, in Samiland (Norway). More than 100 Indian women from 22 countries attended this conference. During this meeting, we committed to constructing an international Indian women's organization which could serve as a forum where we could share experiences, analyze our problems, and make decisions, while at the same time supporting the organizational efforts of Indigenous women around the world, and establishing cooperative relationships with international organizations. Towards this end, a Working Committee was formed with representatives of Samiland, the Arctic region, Australia, the Pacific Islands, North, South, and Central America.

Following the commitments, the First Meeting of South and Central American Indian Women was held in March of 1991, in Lima, Peru. The meeting was inspiring as it showed both the international community and our own brothers the often hidden wealth and strength of women. For the first time, Indian women from South and Central America fully assumed the responsibility for organizing an international conference. It was a demonstration of our own good work, energy, and vision for the future.

The Lima conference also helped consolidate momentum gathered at the Quincentennial Conference in Quito. We discussed strategies on how to bring women of South and Central America together and how to develop links with our sisters in North America. We ratified the need to continue our struggle for the protection of our territories, natural resources, and self-determi-

nation. Four working commissions were designated to continue our tasks, and The Coordinating Commission of South and Central American Indian Women was established.

Through our own efforts, we have participated in meetings which led to the establishment of the Continental Coordinating Committee of Indigenous People (CONIC) in December 1991 and in a follow-up meeting in New York in March 1992 and in Panama in September 1992. Thus, we have ensured the participation of women in this process of continental Indian organization.

Unity and Sisterhood

We have joined our Indian sisters from all over the world, and we have forged unity and sisterhood in our common struggle. We have once more brought Indian women, men, children, and elders together to walk our common path.

The words in this publication come from the hearts of women from Chile to Mexico and describe not only the particular problems which affect Indian women but also our determination to overcome these difficulties. This is a compilation of testimonies of the struggles, the everyday life, and the accomplishments of Indian women from South and Central America. This publication is an introduction to the increasing role of Indian women in international forums, Indigenous organizations, and community self-help projects. It will be followed later by a Resource Guide in Spanish, to make Indian women of the South aware of each other's work and resources and organizations willing to assist them in their organizing efforts.

The Quincentenary has brought many Indian people together. In 1993, the United Nations' Year of the World's Indigenous People, the South and Meso-American Indian Information Center

will continue to work to build stronger communication, support, and collaboration among our people and all those who, like us, are struggling for their freedom.

The Women's Committee of the South and Meso-American Indian Information Center (SAIIC)

NILOCAYUQUEO

Mother Earth

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A MESSAGE OF SOLIDARITY: HEALING OUR COMMUNITIES

"I get my courage and strength from being an Indian"

Cecilia Fire Thunder, Lakota

In 1989, we had a march from the Wounded Knee battle site's Wounded Knee Memorial sign to the radio station five miles away. We stopped, prayed to the four directions that night, and had a candlelight ceremony. We asked everybody on the reservation to turn their lights off and for an hour join us in prayer so we could be strong for our children. And we planted a tree to remember all the people who died of violence in our community, on our reservation. And as long as that tree flourished, we were going to organize and continue to work to eradicate violence. The second year, the tree we planted was for all children, and we vowed that as long as that tree flourished we were going to continue to work to eradicate child abuse.

So many of our Indian women have been sexually abused as children. They tell me that 80 to 90 percent of Indian women in alcohol treatment centers in Canada have been sexually abused. They are saying that 80 percent of the men in alcohol treatment centers have been sexually abused. We've learned these behaviors. They were not here before the white man came in the 1800s. We learned much physical abuse and sexual abuse in the Christian

boarding schools. How could you not learn to inflict violence on others when it was inflicted on you for so long?

Breaking Through the Denial

Every April for National Child Abuse Prevention Month, we would do these extensive radio shows. People who are recovering come on the radio and talk about their pain: the pain of abandonment, the pain of rejection, the pain of not telling anybody.

How can a person know what it's like to be sexually abused if they don't know what happened? There's a lot of pain and denial out there. People didn't want to believe it was happening. People didn't want to accept that these things happen in our community. There's so much more awareness and willingness to talk about it now. How can you get well if you don't talk about it, get it out, and start to deal with it?

DOUBLEDAY

Rose Auger, Cree medicine woman, Canada

The second year we did the radio show, the last show of the series, against my colleagues' advice, I brought in victims of child abuse. I said, "We've been listening to experts and adults talk about child abuse, but tonight we're going to hear from the children's mouths what child abuse is." It was very powerful, very painful. My friends who were with me that night were shocked. But guess what we did? We broke through the denial.

There was so much pain that night. People called asking who they could talk to, where they could go.

People's wounds were opened, reminded of when they were little and when they were hurt. We were overwhelmed by the response but were able to make referrals and talk to one another. We broke through a lot of denial, and there's a lot of good stuff going on in our community now.

A Message for Indian Women

The message that I would like to share with Indian women of South and Central America is that I get my courage and strength from being Indian—my language, my rituals, my ceremonies—and it took me 40 years to come back full circle to recognize that I had everything I needed to be whole and healthy. The Catholic Church and their teachings, and also Western beliefs, tried to make me something different. At the Christian Boarding School, I learned to read and write and how to add and subtract, but they damaged me deep down inside.

Now that I am home in my own community, I am able to speak my language and practice my ceremonies, and to be Indian. Now I am healthy and whole—a little bit more healthy, a little bit more whole.

It is OK to be Indian, it is OK to speak your language, it is OK to be all those things. The gift that we have is the learning gift—that we can function in two worlds. This is what I found that white people don't have is that we Indian people can function in one, two, or three worlds, but always coming back to our world where we find harmony and balance.

The strongest message I want to give is that never, never give up those things that make you who you are. The Creator made me the way I am, and there's nothing I can do to change that. Just accept it and continue looking for all those good things about being Indian and use them as the strength to survive in this world. I can't change it. I can't change being Indian; that's what the Creator made me and gave me all those things, along with making my red color and black hair. These are the gifts that the Creator gave me, along with being whole and healthy, and so that's what I do now. It's been a long journey, and I am starting back at square one again.

Cecilia Fire Thunder is a member of the Oglala Sioux Nation of the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota. As a co-founder of the Oglala-Lakota Women's Society, she is a full-time organizer and has been particularly active in organizing campaigns against alcoholism, domestic violence, and child sexual abuse. This article was adapted from an interview by Xihuanel Huerta, of the SAIIC Women's Committee and co-authored by Rebecca L. Carillo.

ODE TO COLUMBUS

Molding the death mask
of an *indigena* warrior
my fingers
fuse into her history
we share the same
bloodline
her tears melting
together
beneath my touch
into a web of wrinkles
woven by
years of fighting men,
our intertribal men,
contaminated by afflictions
of the spirit
carried by conquistadores
from lands unknown.

Forced *mestizaje,*
internalized rage,
have fueled
a sexual war
of power
a war which has been fought
along the descension of
generational pyramids
a war
against us,
    their wives, daughters, sisters
translated over time,
    a history unwanted,
into *their* possession
    a definition, born to the romans,
    its legacy, more cohesive,
    more toxic than oil,
    still surges through our veins.
my veins
which bleed into
tears
on this death mask
of an *indigena* warrior
whose history
and bloodline
are mine.

Rebecca L. Carrillo
Xicana/Waicuri

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN INDIGENOUS ORGANIZATIONS

"We should be even more united now"

Rebeca Detén, Aguaruna

Any Native person knows how important women have been, since without them, men would not be able to do anything. In our communities, there has always been a respectful division of labor. There has always been collaboration and mutual agreement on everything.

We have always counted on men as they have counted upon us for any activity. Even war we waged together. Since we women knew our rights, we were always respected (because who else would cook the meals or look after the children?), and we helped the men in their struggle. We knew the tracks and the arrival of the enemy, we knew the passwords to give warning and prepared the masato (beer) to give courage to our men. In order to succeed, men and women always stood together.

Machismo: A New Cultural Invasion

But in our communities today, there exists the same type of mistreatment of women that exists in the rest of Peru. Today you can hear such things as, "I am the man; you go to the kitchen," "I have the last word," and things like that.

But this isn't our way, and it is a dangerous path. Now, thanks

to our organizations and experiences, we realize how we have been humiliated and deceived by so many things that came from outside. Now that we are regaining our self-pride, we can't let ourselves be tricked again. *Machismo*, abuse, lack of respect, and the marginalization of Indigenous women is a new cultural invasion that affects us today, one that our men are accepting because they are petty-minded and ashamed to show our reality which is more dignified. *Machismo* has, just like religion and culture, been imposed upon us from outside. It divides us, weakens us, and humiliates us.

We can't be so blind not to see that through imitating them (outsiders), we lose 50 percent of our strength as Indigenous people.

AGUIRRE/SWITKES/AMAZONIA

Baniwa woman grating Manioc, Brazil

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If we fought together in the past, we should be even more united today now that our problems are more serious and our enemies more powerful.

Women in Indigenous Organizations

Our organizations are very new and very young. Relations with the authorities require that we speak Spanish, and we can move more freely than women normally are able to. But now that we are becoming stronger, we see that this is not everything, because to struggle as Indigenous people, speaking Spanish isn't enough. Do the *Apus*, our community leaders, speak Spanish? They are chosen for their knowledge, for their experience.

And we women, don't we have experience? Today, it is the Indigenous women who keep more of our culture. Moreover, who says that Indigenous women can't learn Spanish?

So, we women ask our Indigenous organizations not to curtail us, not to make us feel ashamed. They should look for alternatives so that we can participate in our common struggle, and so that we are not deceived by outsiders.

How many women leaders are there in Indigenous organizations? In my organization, there still aren't any, even though the organizations are dealing with important problems about which women have much to say.

We say that one important problem is the defense of the land. Yet there has been no effort to invite women to take legal training. In reality, who can best defend the land than those who are more in contact with her? Women tend their fields every day, and we know all about traditional agricultural science. We know where the sweet potatoes sprout, when we must find a new plot, and how to care for a plant. Now that they are cutting our area and we see

our lands becoming poorer, who is it that suffers most? The women feel the pain of the land more.

In my community, we have demonstrated that women know how to stand up. There are many examples of women fighting in defense of community lands against the gringo mining companies. We are not afraid and we need to know what is happening. How should we defend our lands?

Maternity Health Project

A very important area in which I work is that of health. Within this very important area, the principal problems are infant health, domestic hygiene, and traditional medicine. Needless to say, it is the woman that holds the solution to these problems.

In the beginning, women were not involved in the work of our organization, but life itself has made us all see more clearly. It is the women that spend all their time with the babies, and in our customs it is difficult for a woman to bring up personal things with a man.

Our organization, the Aguaruna and Huambisa Council, established a mother's and infant's program in which we trained 16 women. This is the area where women have been most involved in our organization. At first it was difficult, but we've already been working for four years and participated in the last general assembly. This was not planned, but developed out of necessity.

The Council has a maternity and infant's program within its health project, which began in 1986. The closest hospital is three days away from Napuruka, and therefore the Council began courses in health training for Native women. Currently, there are 36 women working as nurses within the program. Recently, however, some have left because they did not have enough time to

take care of their homes, their small children, and their husbands.

Traditional medicine is also used. When modern medicine doesn't work, we resort to traditional medicine or vice versa. Traditional medicine is used more for births, to relax pain, and to help push. Medicinal plants are also used to protect the newborn by immunizing him against bugs and to strengthen resistance to disease.

Another problem is the number of children being born. In the old days, women knew the secret of traditional contraceptive plants. When her man went to war, a woman would use the plants, taking advantage of the fact that the men were away for a month or so. But now with the influence of religion and the church, many men say the plants should not be used because it is a sin, that this is the devil's work, and so little by little the women are giving up the use of these plants. But I ask myself if it is the church that will take care of our children, and what happens when the man leaves with somebody else?

Teaching Our Children

Another theme is education. We see the need to once again give importance to our own culture and knowledge. AIDESEP, our national organization, is already working for change. We are proposing a new school curriculum that includes our own knowledge. This is a very important step forward.

The creation of our teaching curriculum is made possible, in part, because we women still exist and keep our culture alive. In education, we play an important role. Children spend more time with us and, if our culture is going to once again be important, we can teach them a lot. If an Indigenous curriculum exists, we can tell them "This is how it is, this is how it was, this is truth, this

is how it is done..." But if the knowledge comes from outside, from the urban areas, we can't say much. "You don't know anything," they will tell us. This leads to corruption. The child doesn't respect anything, especially not the woman who doesn't understand what he has been taught in school. For this reason, AIDESEP's initiative is important. It must include women as the main elements of this new form of education. We cannot regain our culture and at the same time exclude women (from our organizations) simply because we don't know the imposed culture.

It is important to look for new alternatives, to not remain in the past, so that all of us, men and women, can build our new society and our new history together.

Rebeca Detén, Aguaruna, is director of the maternity and infant health project of the Aguaruna and Huambisa Council which is comprised of 92 Native communities in the Peruvian Amazon along the Marañón and Santiago Rivers and their tributaries. Source: International Work Group on Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA), from the book Indigenous Women on the Move.

WARA ALDERETE/SAIIC

Quechua woman carries baby in traditional way

"We are each half of this world"

Calixta Gabriel, Maya Cachiquel

We, as Mayan women, have an important role, not only now but historically as well. Within the Mayan cosmovision, the respect for and the purpose and function of women is integral to our society. Within the Mayan world view, the woman is not oppressed, but through time we can see the separation of many and woman.

I believe that our spirituality is alive and maintained in our Mayan communities. There are many women especially in the area of medicine. There are many midwives who have important roles such as nurses and psychiatrists and whose main role is to care for the women and the children.

I believe that, in a sense, we are the teachers, the guides for new generations. In spiritual aspects, cultural discrimination does not exist. There are both male and female priests among the Maya who conduct the same ceremonies.

Historical Roles of Men and Women

According to the Popol Vuh, sacred book of the Mayans and the Quiches, there is no historical reference to the woman as a

Calixta Gabriel (Cachiquel) and Renilda Martinez (Wayúu) in Samiland

lesser person. In the story of creation, both man and woman have important roles. When *Ixmukanec* took the corn, he formed humans, and that is why we are children of the corn. What that means is that the corn is the spirit of life, and it represents the nine months of pregnancy.

In no instance is there reference to woman being created from man. On the contrary, women are an important part of history, and that is manifested in our life, in the relationship of woman with nature, with the animal life, with all life; there is no separation. According to the Mayan *naguales*, there are dual forces. There is duality of man and woman and woman and man, and this is manifested in spirits. There are very powerful spirits that accompany us and orient us towards our destiny.

Women and Spirituality

Christianity and Catholicism took advantage of the people of Central America. With the invasion, not only were our grandmothers exploited and displaced. Their hierarchical, spiritual, social, and political roles were negated, and in most cases killed.

This is proven at Chichicastenango; it is clear that where the Church saw our Mayan temples, they forced the construction of their churches over our own altars. It was a way of invading the religious places of our grandfathers. Our priests still pray in front of these sites because they know that the spirits of our grandparents are still present. There is El Cerrito del Carmen, and Esquipulas, and many sacred sites that are now Christian or Catholic. Many people still go there because there is a historical sense of the Mayan spirit that has not been lost.

The woman is the generator of culture, education, and spirituality. Beginning in the home, she plays an important role in the education of the children. She begins to teach the children to speak our native language, and to teach them good manners, and how they should conduct themselves with the elders. The woman also has an important role in the teaching of music and spiritual ways, because she begins to sing to the children. She imitates the birds or the sounds of nature; it is a way of communicating with the Gods and the forces. The woman teaches art in the same way she observes nature. She teaches mathematics when she begins to teach her son or daughter how to weave or string the loom. There is a day in our calendar, *Axma*, which is the day of weaving, to weave and unravel. It is like the beginning of life when she teaches a child to count. That is where the children learn to count and to sing.

In spite of all of the oppression of women, we have remained

strong spiritually, because if that didn't exist all respect would have been lost. With Western education, we would all be dead. There are many people who have realized that religion is like the umbilical cord of the people, that spirituality is the armament of any nation and is the root of our survival, the essence of our culture.

Spiritual Traditions Revived

In Guatemala, there are more than 5,000 Mayan priests, men and women, each one with their own specialties and qualities. Some are specialists in taking care of bones, others are specialists in diagnosis, others in medicinal plants or in ancestral medicine and other forms of healing.

It gives us much hope that there are people who still practice our religion despite the persecution. Our religion was being practiced secretly because Christianity had threatened us, killed us, and accused our religion of being witchcraft. Many times even some Indigenous people may think this way, but it is not our fault. It is this system that tried to destroy our culture and to force the disappearance of the Mayas and other Indigenous people.

Now there is a reaction to all the political violence. Many more women and youth have become involved, including Mayan priests, in seminars, exchanges, and workshops on both the national level and within each ethnic group. There have been week-long gatherings where for the first time Mayan priests are showing themselves publicly and saying, "I am a Mayan priest. I can say, accept, and be who I am."

We are organizing a congress of Mayan priests and other Indigenous people throughout the American continent to be held around the time of the winter equinox, December 23, 1992. We hope to have the participation of Native elders from North America,

South America, and Mexico.

My brothers and sisters of this continent, there are no differences in the way we pray and think. When we feel these natural messages, we feel our oneness. Like the Popol Vuh says, we all go forward together. No one stays behind. We all walk together. And we believe this to be true.

It is said that we will go and we will return. The spirits of our ancestors, our grandparents, live with us. I believe that their spirits have illuminated our knowledge so that we can continue to go forward, and that there will be more encounters and more spiritual exchanges between ourselves, both culturally and politically.

I would like to say that we know of the existence of our relatives, and we ask to be included in your prayers for peace on this earth, our Mother Earth that embraces us in her arms with her *huipil*, and I'd also like to say that the heart of the sky and the earth give you many blessings and that you are illuminated. I hope that we can participate together, communicate, and exchange our experiences. I pray that the heart of the sky, the spirit of the eagle, the spirit of the buffalo, of Quetzalcoatl and of Comatz illuminate all of my brothers and sisters.

Calixta Gabriel was forced to flee Guatemala due to military repression. Two of her brothers disappeared. For several years, she was a refugee in the U.S. Now, she has returned to her village to work with spiritual leaders to reaffirm the spiritual traditions of her community.

"Women had the same rights as men."

Before the Spanish conquest, we had our own education that was only passed down from fathers to sons, from the greatest scientists, such as *Yachac Taitas, Yachac Camayuc, Tachac Mamas,* and others. In these ways, we Indians gave practical education with the emphasis on teaching, seeing, and making ourselves learn.

Tránsito Amaguaña , Yachac Mama, Ecuador

Before the Spanish invasion, women were considered as having the same rights as men, and their workload was equal. They cultivated agricultural products that had a great quantity of proteins. There was plenty and when there was too much they put some away for lean times. They raised animals that provided meat, wool, and hides, and from which they made clothes—ponchos, *bas, centros, fachlinas,* and all the things they needed to clothe themselves. With the leather they made bags and the poncho which they used in the *páramo.* They made clay pots, *pondos de barro,* plates, and other utensils for family use. The women were in charge of educating their children, while the men worked to maintain the home. The woman was in charge of taking care of life, and was comparable to the mother earth, because all had a profound respect for her and her role in organizing the tasks and community life.

Here in the lands of Tahuantinsuyo, women participated in the government together with the Inca and were in charge of maintaining life in the temples and worked with the community in times of planting and harvesting. But after the invasion, these

women were victims of the bad instincts of the Spanish who arrived on these shores. In 1492, the Europeans arrived, and with them came the start of destruction of our customs, our labors, our religion, and our culture.

The Europeans despised our language, our form of dress, and our organization. They considered and used women only as objects, thus taking away our values and respect. So now they say that the woman is only good for raising children and cooking.

Source: Ecuarunari: "Riccharishum, Que se oiga la voz de las mujeres indigenas del Ecuador," September 1991. Riccharimui ECUARUNARI is a regional organization that includes 12 grassroots federations.

MELINA SILVERSTON

Quechua women expelled from their land, Ecuador

"We are like a sack of quinoa. It is blown away only by the wind. We are like the grass of the páramo that is pulled up and returns to grow again, and it is from the grass of the páramo that we will plant a new world."
Dolores Cacuango, Quechua

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ACUIPE/SANTOS/AMAZONIA

Surui basketmaker, Brazil

Before the contact with whites, what existed for us was this equality of values. Above all else, Indigenous societies are made up of people who have values, functions, and jobs to perform. Women usually stayed in the village. Their power was more in the house. And the political question was linked more closely with the men.

This continued after the contact even more because women were raped, and so women of some Indigenous groups stayed home out of fear that they would be assaulted. This reinforced the idea that men would have contact with arms and with war. So there was a division.

A great disequilibrium arose in our societies. Before, the men in our village did not have this idea of the sexes but instead considered women with respect, as companions, an idea in balance that we are each half of this world. This was destroyed by the contact.

Severiá Idiorie, Karajá Javae, Brazil

RESOLUTIONS FROM MEETINGS OF INDIGENOUS WOMEN

"Walking with steady steps"

Following is a synthesis of resolutions from recent meetings which have been organized by and for Indigenous women. We have come together to share experiences and solidarity, and to strengthen our organizational process.

WARA ALDERETE/SAIIC

Andean women writing resolutions of women's caucus

First International Encounter of South and Central American Indian Women

Lima, Peru, March 25-27, 1991

Our goals are:

1. To promote and develop consciousness and awareness among women of different Indian communities, and to strengthen and complement our brothers within Indigenous organizations, with the goal of achieving the well-being of our people; to assert Indigenous women's rights so we can contribute to strengthening and supporting economic, social, political, and cultural growth within our communities; to promote the participation of our families and communities in the struggle for the rights of our people.

2. To promote women's organizing within our communities, so we can bring and exchange cultural and organizing experiences with Indigenous and popular organizations in order to strengthen the women's organizations at the community level; and to establish a system of communications among Indian organizations so that we can develop a network of solidarity at the national and international level.

3. To assert our identity as Indian people, by rescuing and protecting our cultural and ancestral heritage; to promote and struggle for the implementation of bilingual and inter-cultural education in each country, so that our cultural identity will be strengthened. This must include teaching our traditional heritage: crafts, history, music, traditional medicine, and ways of life; literacy must be taught in our languages, according to our culture and ways of life.

4. To demand legalization of our lands and to preserve our territories and to reaffirm our right to self-determination.

Delegates at International Indian Women's Conference, Lima, 1991

Plan of Action

In order to achieve our goals, we plan to promote meetings among the women of our organizations, discuss viable ways to work for the solutions to our problems, and to disseminate in our communities the resolutions of every meeting that we attend. We will support the participation of community organizers in forums, conferences, and workshops to promote the development of critical thinking, so they can share these experiences with their people.

Teaching materials for bilingual education will be developed, taking into account the reality of the different Indian peoples, and

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training will be provided for Indian women in different professional areas, such as health, education, mass media, crafts, agriculture, etc. We will produce and disseminate informational materials to document the activities of each organization and will establish community libraries so our people can be informed. We aim to achieve the participation of the family in the work of strengthening the community organizations.

We will work to protect our traditional territories.

An Analysis of Women's Organizing

Indian women play a fundamental role in the struggle for our cultural rights and in the decision making processes, but many times our work is not acknowledged, and we are ignored even by other women in our organizations. We Indian women feel that we have the capacity to be chosen for positions of responsibility in the political, economic, social, and cultural areas of the different countries.

The protagonist role that we used to have in our communities has been hampered by evidences of the influence of *machismo* in our ways of thinking, and we Indigenous women suffer physical and psychological abuse both within and outside our homes. The laws of our countries do not recognize the rights of Indian women and children.

Throughout time, from the Spanish Invasion to the present, we Indian women have demonstrated that we can organize ourselves and develop our own ways of working for our communities. This is why it is necessary to have an organization at the regional level that can bring together the Indian people of Central and South America.

In some Indian organizations, the women do not have

significant participation; we do not have the opportunity to maintain communications with other organizations, and we feel isolated from other organizations which might have positive experiences of structural and practical participation. Meetings of Indian women are very useful, because we can exchange ideas and experiences from our different communities.

Even if we are forced to migrate to the cities, in some cases we can take advantage of this situation to work for the rights of our people and strengthen our cultural identity in a strange environment. We can be useful to our people whether from within or from outside our communities.

Resolutions

1. We demand the governments of each country acknowledge our existence as Indigenous people with territorial, social, cultural, and political rights. We demand respect and acknowledgment for our cultural expressions: language, dance, music, etc.

2. We condemn the commercialization of Indigenous women through activities such as sterilization programs, and our exploitation as cheap labor by capitalist countries, and the theft and commercialization of our children and young people. We condemn the pillage and theft of natural resources that is taking place in our communities. We women are witness to the sufferings that this brings to our families.

3. At the present time, we view as our priority the need to work at the grassroots level, to develop, promote, and support the organization of Indigenous women, and the participation in the decision making process at the community and organizational level. We ratify the goal of working at the local and national level to assure that this process will lead to a truly representative and

participative organization of South and Central American Indian women. And we ratify our decision to participate in the process that will lead to the development of an International Council of Indigenous Women, according to our own initiatives and resolutions.

Contact: Alicia Canaviri, CDIMA or Yolanda Hernandez

WARA ALDERETE/SANC

Peruvian rainforest women at Lima

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Women's Commission, First Continental Meeting of Indian Peoples —500 Years of Resistance

Quito, Ecuador, July 17-21, 1990

As women, we are particularly identified with the land. We recognize that land is life. For this reason, we must respect ourselves as women. This Mother Earth is the only one that we have, so we have to respect her, take care of her, and love her. All the countries are destroying and raping Mother Earth. She is dying and we are dying. We take seriously our responsibility to defend her.

The invasion of non-Indigenous values has adversely affected the relation between women and men in the home and the role of the women in the communities and nations. All of us have been victims of this oppressive system, of the Western vices such as addiction, and of the violence of a culture that is anti-life. We state clearly that the first step is to reestablish our Indigenous identity so that we can join men and women together once again. To lose our identity is to lose the balance of nature, which has always been a balance between the masculine and feminine. We have to recoup our traditional values, our Indigenous ways of organization, and act as a community. Before the arrival of Western values, the woman made up half of the cosmos. To reestablish the balance in our homes and to realize self-determination and liberation as oppressed peoples, women and men must participate equally, according to the traditional values of our Indigenous nations. Now, *compañeros*, we have to work to reestablish the balance in this meeting.

WARA ALDERETE/SAIIC

Crisina Marquez, Aymara from Bolivia, addressing Quito Conference

Religious Freedom

The churches should respect our religions as we respect theirs. We have the right to practice our Indigenous beliefs, to have our sacred sites. Instead of celebrating the 500 years, the churches should ask our pardon and observe our mourning and our pain. We must have the right to religious beliefs according to our Indigenous beliefs. We have to protect our sacred sites, those places where our ancestors are resting.

Militarism is anti-life, anti-earth, anti-woman. Militarism is the destruction of our traditional culture, the destruction of our way of thinking and acting. We are against military recruitment, which robs from us our children and our brothers, so they may serve as cannon fodder in the hands of the oppressors. When they return home, they no longer know how to live freely, in peace, without military intervention, without war.

We are aware that we cannot achieve the goals of our struggle in isolation. Within the oppressive system, we feel isolated as Indigenous nations and as women. We suffer for lack of information. The mass media do not communicate the truth effectively, according to our objectives and needs. They distort the reality of our deeds. For example, few knew about the rising up of Ecuadorian Indians before this meeting. We conclude that it is necessary to establish a network of communication and effective support, as well as a continental coordination of women.

Increased Participation by Women

We agree that all Indigenous women of the continent should participate in a coordinated manner in the distinct activities around the quincentenary of the poorly-named "discovery of America." We declare it a day of mourning for Indigenous peoples.

From today forward, we will participate actively in the national and international tribunals guaranteeing Indigenous representation. We don't accept intermediation by great intellectuals who use us as objects of folklore. We are all living beings of the cosmos. In this meeting, we have planted the basics; the work will continue when we return to our communities, to our organizations. We are working for self-development which reflects our values and our needs—training in organizing, an end to illiteracy, eradication of addictions and vices such as alcoholism and drug abuse, reestablishment and development of the use of our traditional medicine without rejecting those technologies that have been developed for the good of humanity, and the revival of our systems of nutrition and agriculture.

To live following our Indigenous values is to be concerned with the well-being and harmony of all, wiping out poverty and inequality. We need everybody; each person has his place, the elders as much as the youth. We must support the widows, the orphans, the single mothers, and the elders as we always have among our peoples.

As women, and as Indigenous people! We feel our connection with *Mamallacta, Pachacmama.* To be able to end this meeting in balance and harmony with her, we must be here where we are near the earth, where we have our sacred fire.

AGUIRRE/SMITH/ESE/AMAZONIA

Huaorani woman at organizing meeting

Second International Indigenous Women's Conference

Samiland, Norway, August 5-9, 1990

We heard the testimony of our Indigenous sisters on issues related to the global environmental crisis, the effects of exploitation of our ancestral territories and natural resources on our lives as women, the impacts of militarization and nuclearization, and the presence of foreign military bases in our lands and seas. We tried to understand how powerful nations and governments have imposed state laws on us which have institutionalized discrimination and repression and have facilitated the rape of our lands.

We were also made aware that patriarchal systems have been imposed on us by such oppressive structures to further divide our people and to assure the continued domination by these powerful nations and multinational corporations.

We are alarmed by the continuing number of Indigenous women and children being victimized by military operations in the guise of anti-Communism, as shared with us by our sisters in Central and South America and in Asia. The number of Indigenous women being raped, sexually abused, tortured, arbitrarily arrested, savaged, and becoming widows, has been increasing since the United States government launched its low-intensity warfare strategy on the various South and Central American and Asian nations which have national liberation movements.

The rapid degradation of the environment in our ancestral homelands has caused irreparable damage to our lives and lands. We grieve over what has happened to Mother Earth, and we share the pain of our sisters who have been victimized by racist policies, who have been dehumanized by militarization, who have become "commodified" because of tourism and the debt crisis, and those

who have to suffer incurable diseases, carry toxins in their breast milk, and give birth to deformed or mutilated babies because of nuclear radiation and toxic waste dumping.

International Indigenous Women's Conference, Karasjohka, Samiland, August 5-9, 1990

Forming an International Network

We are strengthened by our sisters who refuse to be immobilized in spite of these dehumanizing situations. We are inspired by the courage, steadfastness, determination, and commitment of many of our Indigenous sisters to continue working for a transformed society where oppression of Indigenous women because of race, class, gender, and nationality will no longer exist.

We believe that the formation of an international network of Indigenous women will help to further our struggles to be

liberated from all forms of oppression, but this network should always ensure that Indigenous women from the grassroots level are always represented in decision making bodies and general assemblies which this network will have.

We accept our responsibility for sharing what has transpired in this conference with the rest of our sisters who are not here with us, and we will strive to continue expanding the linkages between ourselves, within the region, and in the world.

We affirm our commitment to persist in empowering ourselves through sustained education work, setting up of more Indigenous women's organizations, and working out development and action programs which are sensitive and responsive to the needs and demands of the majority.

We are in solidarity with our sisters from the Americas who are going to celebrate 500 years of resistance against colonization, and we look forward to joining with them in their celebration.

We declare:

The rights of the world's Indigenous people to self-government and self-determination to be inherent and inalienable rights, the assertion and pursuit of which must be acknowledged and respected by the industrialized nations of the world.

Colonization and imperialism and the practices associated with these governmental policies, including militarism, tourism, and industrialization, to be genocidal practices which threaten the existence of the Indigenous peoples of the world.

Goals of the International Council of Indigenous Women

It will be our purpose to work towards the establishment of an International Council of Indigenous Women which would accomplish the following goals:

1. To provide for all Indigenous women a forum to share cultural, political, and spiritual experiences with each other and with the entire world;

2. To establish a network of communications or a system of interchange of cultural, political, and spiritual experiences between Indigenous women the world over;

3. To support the demands of Indigenous women based upon their right to self-determination;

4. To inform Indigenous women about their human rights and other fundamental liberties that are guaranteed by the U.N. and various governments, and to work so that rights that have still not been recognized are guaranteed;

5. To stimulate and support Indigenous women in their work to organize and establish networks of communication that serve to channel their concerns and demands, whether through women's organizations or mixed groups;

6. To actively participate in discussions within the Indigenous people's movements, the women's movements, and other relevant movements, in order to articulate, promote, and project women's issues in the broadest way possible;

7. To establish a relationship with international bodies such as the U.N., and national organizations such as parliaments and congresses, in order to pressure them to respond to questions concerning Indigenous women;

8. To forge networks of cooperation between Indigenous people's organizations and other non-governmental organizations that are interested in offering their support and direct cooperation to the Council.

Contact: Maret Sara, Sami Women's Association or Winona LaDuke, Indigenous Women's Network

WARA ALDERETE/SAIC

Sami women at Indigenous Women's Conference, Samiland (Norway)

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First Encounter of Aymara Women Leaders

La Paz, Bolivia, October 9-10, 1991

Our motivation in organizing this meeting was that there are many Aymara organizations, but the coordination between them is not very good. It is curious and sad that the leaders of political organizations find themselves divided. We have to reflect on this and come up with proposals for unity to overcome this crisis.

We want this encounter to mark the beginning of the burying of five centuries of darkness and the beginning of preparations to celebrate the new era: *Pachakuti* (The children return for power and territory).

This Encounter of Aymara Women Leaders was an attempt to discuss the theme of unity among our organizations and to serve as a basis for further meetings which will discuss, analyze, and enrich the conclusions of this First Encounter of Aymara Women Leaders.

Conclusions of Aymara Women Leaders

History shows us that the Aymara were, since time immemorial, the true owners of these lands. For this reason, they do not accept the Spanish invasion of 1492, and they declare a struggle with their own vision of history and with their own methods and strategies. If they were dominated, it was only by force. When they were forced from their lands and forced to accept the Western religion, they maintained their culture and their language thanks to their unending struggle and through methods and strategies that came from their own intelligence.

During the colonial and republican eras and even now, the participation of women was as decisive as that of men. Women and

men fought on every occasion for the life of the Aymara people.

History mentions very little of women, but we are aware that we are an active part of our nation. Men and women are complementary.

The women supported the heaviest weight in the Spanish invasion. They suffered a triple humiliation—as women, as wife-mothers, and as worker. The Spaniards didn't come with women, so Indigenous women were objects of rape; they witnessed the suffering, humiliation, and death of their husbands and children and were submitted to forced labor. Yet they survived this situation and fought strongly against the invaders. We have as concrete examples Bartolina Sisa, Micaela Bastidas, Gregoria Apasa, and others.

DOKUMORDT

Tzutuhil girl, Santiago Atitlan, Guatemala

"We women are a new alternative for struggle."

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Working for Unity

We women must look at our cultural position and the reality in which we live, reflect on our cultural roots, and overcome all types of marginalization to give value to ourselves.

The history of our people, the experiences of the struggles of our ancestors, our current struggles, and the experience of our contradictions must be the fundamental basis for unity.

We must systematize our objectives in the long, medium, and short run according to the story of our grandparents, on the basis of the history of the moment, and scientific and technological development, both traditionally and of today, so we may reach a true unity.

We women are a new alternative for struggle and an option to reflect with our *compañeros* and to mobilize the unity of our organizations in a united way between men and women based on the Andean philosophy, which is dual and communitarian.

This is an Indian option, an alternative option to the majority, and is for all without discrimination, for the entire world.

The Center of Ideological Discussion of Aymara Women (CDI-MA)

AQUAPE/SWITKES/AMAZONIA

Shuar woman broadcasting radio education classes

AGUIRRE/SWITKES/AMAZONIA

Quichua girl, Ecuador

World Women's Congress for a Healthy Planet, International Indigenous Women's Caucus

Miami, Florida, November 8-12, 1991

As Indigenous people, our lives are intertwined with the natural world. Our creation stories tell of our emergence in traditional homelands, which continue to nurture and give meaning to our lives. We are inseparable from the lands in which we as peoples were created.

We view our responsibilities to care for the earth as our mother. As Indigenous peoples, we are witnessing the destruction of our sacred Mother Earth. She is being raped as the forests are clear-cut, gouged in the search for minerals, and poisoned by

radioactive and chemical waste as we as her children are being destroyed in the ruthless search to seize her precious gifts for human consumption. The suffering and pain of Mother Earth is felt by us as if it were our own. She is being destroyed, as we are being destroyed, at a rate in which it is impossible for healing and renewal.

As Indigenous peoples, we have lived in our traditional homelands for tens of thousands of years in harmony and balance with all of the natural world. We believe that all living things were given life by the Creator, and as such we are all co-equal beings sharing the gifts of our sacred Mother Earth. We are dependent upon her for our sustenance, interdependent upon one another for the fulfillment of our lives, and interconnected with each other spiritually and physically. As human beings, it is our responsibility to care for each other and all living things with the same love that the Creator showed in giving us life. We were born into the world to evolve as fully living, caring, and compassionate beings and to share these gifts with all living things. The Creator gave us natural laws to instruct us in the way in which we must live upon the earth so as to live in harmony and balance with all of life, taking only what is required for our survival and acknowledging these many gifts of life which were given so that we may live.

A Path to the Future

Today we face the destruction of the human spirit and the consequent destruction of the natural world. In human beings' search to fulfill physical and material desires, we are sacrificing the earth and the natural world peoples. In order to cease this destruction, it is incumbent upon all human beings to:

1. Recognize that all human actions, laws, and policies must be informed by an ethic based upon adherence to the laws of the natural world that govern creation and which are embodied in the spiritual traditions of Indigenous peoples.

2. Include a long-range perspective in our ethic that ensures a positive impact on the next generations of all living things.

3. Recognize that honoring and protecting the diversity of life must include not only the plant and animal world but also the diversity of peoples and the spirituality, cultures, and ways of life inherent within.

4. Recognize that all of life is sacred, co-equal, and entitled to existence apart from any relationship to human beings.

5. Protect the rights of Indigenous peoples to our homelands and ways of life to ensure our continuation as peoples living in the manner in which we were instructed by the Creator.

6. Reflect the love of the Creator in our lives, and in our daily thoughts, feelings, words, and actions be mindful of our impact upon all living things and make clear choices that support life rather than destroy it.

The true challenge of human beings is to place our full attention upon ways in which we can live upon Mother Earth in a manner consistent with natural law and in peace, harmony, and balance with all living things.

Source: World Women's Congress Secretariat : Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO)

"The true challange of human beings
is to live upon Mother Earth
in a manner consistent
with natural law."

"We are opening our eyes"

Patricia Gualinga, Quichua

We marched along with the men to Quito to demand the recognition of our ancestral territories. The women in Amazonia are fighting together to defend our people from the oil companies' threats to our territories. The oil companies come in, and they bring disruptive ideas. They are trying to change the way our men act. One example is that they are trying to prostitute our women. So we have to be strong. Some women get pregnant. This is very bad for the community. The women feel embarrassed and they move to the cities.

SAIIC

Patricia Gualinga at march from rainforest to Quito, April 1992

So, we are supporting the Women's organization of Sarayaco and OPIP, because it's very important. We need to find solutions for our problems, and we don't want our women going to work for other people as servants anymore.

We're trying to do something for ourselves, not for other people. Also, we're trying to give support to our women elders, and in general with community life. We really are trying to help each other, doing *mingas* (collective work) and when we make *chicha*, we talk and plan many things.

The situation is different than before. Maybe the women are more active because they need to be to survive. We organize training seminars for women in culture, medicine, and other things they have to learn—things from our past that we have nearly lost.

Our spiritual life is still alive through our *shamanes*, even though some of our people are Christian. We are trying to regain our spiritual tradition, because it is ours. We the women know very well about these things. It is hard to tell you through this tape recorder just how it is.

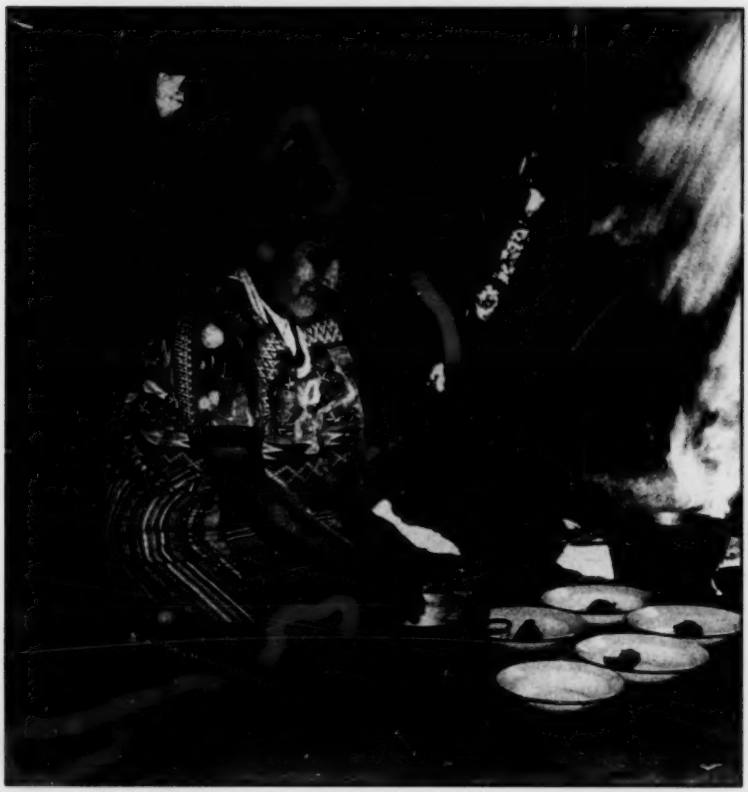
Two Different Worlds

It has been a long journey without communication, but now is the time to communicate, and we are opening our eyes, and this is the time that the women throughout the world can get together. I am talking about this world, because we are living in two worlds. One is the white world, and the Western way. But inside of the community we are living in another world, the world of Indigenous people. In that way, we have to learn about these two different worlds. If we know our own knowledge but don't know how the other world acts, it will be very hard to defend ourselves from them, and it will be easy for them to continue to oppress us.

It is true that some men don't want to accept that there is *machismo*, but it still exists in some men. But we are not against the men. We are working together with them. We are not feminists. The men also have to understand that we are trying to

defend ourselves, because the Indian women are considered as not having value, as being second-class citizens. For example, when we go to El Puyo, the capital of Pastaza province, the white and *mestizo* men make fun of us and call us names; they don't respect us. We have to defend ourselves.

Patricia Gualinga, Quichua from Sarayaco, Ecuador, a member of OPIP (Organization of Indigenous Peoples of Pastaza) and CONFENIAE (Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of the Ecuadoran Amazon) participated in the April 1992 march from the Amazon to the capital to press for the demarcation of rainforest lands.



MONTAGUPPE

Mayan woman, Guatemela

"We are proud of the fact that we organized by ourselves."

Carmen Pereyra de Noe

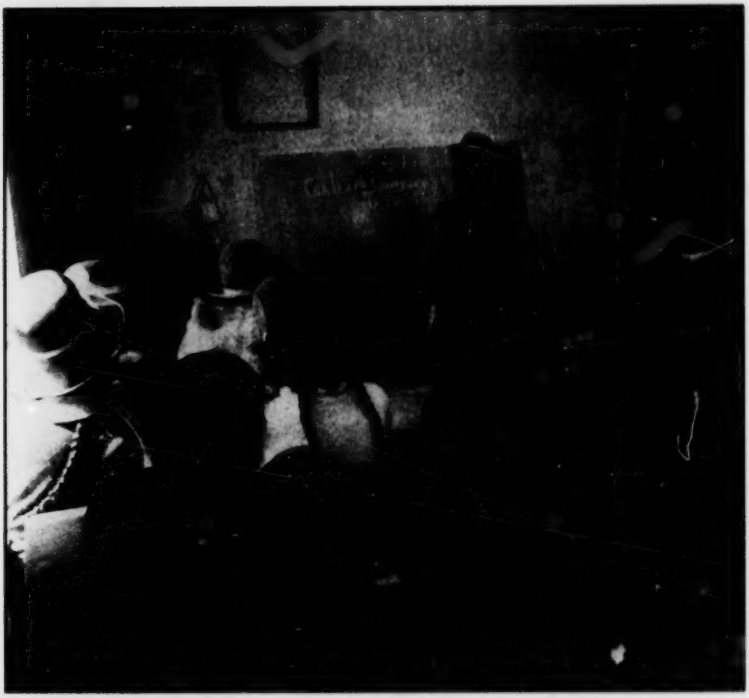
In 1988, we built a school, we women, because there was no space in other schools for our children. We got together and built this school in 25 nights, because we had other jobs during the day. We started it, and then called the men, and we worked together in harmony.

A non-profit organization which exports food offered to collaborate with us. We were to build the school, and they would pay us with food. We worked and when it was time to get the food, they refused to give it to us, saying that we had never worked.

That made me angry, and I said to the women, "Why don't we get together to form an organization of women? Otherwise, we will continue to be abused with the same problems. I believe with an organization we can overcome what they are doing to us. All of us who face working each day for our bread face these problems."

Since we had no money, we went to Caritas and to the mayor's office, but no one wanted to work with us. We wrote a letter to Santa Cruz, to CIDOB (Center of Indigenous Peoples of Eastern Bolivia) saying that we had decided to organize and asking 300 *bolivianos*, not even dollars. This was enough to bring women from the region together. One hundred women participated and the organization of women was born. We have organized by ourselves, and we are proud of this.

I prefer to work from outside, and I asked several women to form the directorate, but they said that I had to be the



Training session for Quechua and Aymara women, Oruro Bolivia

representative of the women. They chose me as the president, and I couldn't refuse, because if you are chosen as the representative, it is because they have confidence in you.

My husband, Don Ernesto, has been director of the organization of Indigenous people of the Bolivian Amazon. I have eight children, the youngest of which is 12 years old. Three live with me, and the others work. Don Ernesto is also involved in organizing, and he doesn't make any problems. Sometimes we both travel, he to one place and I to another. Then I leave my children by themselves.

AGUARUNA WOMEN/AMAZONIA

Huaorani women at rainforest meeting, Ecuador

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Women are Still Abused

In Santa Ana, they abused one woman. She worked for a family that had been involved in the drug trade. She wanted to quit that job, and they said they would meet with her that night. When she left the house, they kidnapped her. They beat and abused her and made her sleep in the water, because they were afraid she would tell what she knew about them.

Men do not beat their wives so much anymore. Now it is the women's organization that has to look at these problems of abuse. We are overcoming this, but it is still happening in some communities. If there is a community where a man abuses his wife, the leaders of its women's organization go and call attention to him.

Before, the women were quiet about it, but now they go and tell. Before, the husbands didn't want women participating in meetings. They said that the woman was to cook and take care of her babies. There was no way for her to speak or go to the meetings. Now men and women meet together.

Women at the Forefront

In 1991, there was a great Indigenous march from the Bolivian rainforest to the government headquarters in La Paz to ask for recognition of Indigenous territories. The government signed a decree granting these territories. But do you think they are complying with these decrees?

In the Chimanes forest, these is a problem with lumber companies. There is a decree of the government, but they do not have to comply with it, and they continue to cut trees. We have had meetings and put control brigades at strategic points where they enter, and for this the Women's Organization of San Ignacio

and the main Indigenous organization have had to go there.

The women were at the front in this case, because we don't mind dying. We first held a meeting of men and women. Then we formed a commission to keep the lumber company out. A woman from San Ignacio took the initiative, and I would not stay behind; I had to go also to defend our land. We confiscated an 8 hp motor, two drums of fuel, two chainsaws, and the lumber which belonged to the lumber company. This lumber we will sell, and it will be used for the good of the community, to build a school and health clinic or to buy notebooks for the children of these communities.

One hundred percent of our youth are illiterate, and we don't want this to continue. Many children die for lack of medical attention, and we want to build health clinics and train people as nurses' aides. Who is it that takes the initiative to do this work? It is the women, because we know about the problems with health. There is diarrhea, vomiting, fever, and those who live in the countryside are bitten by insects. From this, many children and elderly die.

Carmen Pereyra de Noe, President of the Center of Indigenous Women of the Beni Region, Bolivia

Faustina from Todos Santos, Guatemala

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"When we are left without land, we feel like an uprooted tree."

Renilda Martinez, Wayúu

The natural and cultural environment, the family structure, and the entire social fabric of the indigenous peoples, make up a totality for the indigenous woman.

The balance among the elements of life: air, land, water, fire, and sky, is all part of family and village life, with a global respect for all living things. The natural environment is the immediate reference for daily life.

We, the *Wayúu*, inhabitants of the peninsula of Guajira, are keepers of an ancient culture with complex social, economic, and legal institutions, with strong human values, and we live in harmony with nature. The *Wayúu* society is structured around maternal clans, in which a woman has a fundamental role that has not been destroyed by cultural invasion.

The old *Wayúu* say that we are children of *Juya* (The Rain) and *Mma* (The Earth), and that the trees, the mountains, and the animals are our relatives. We see the earth as a source of nourishment; she is the creator of life. In the land we have our roots, and if the land is taken away from us, it is as if they are pulling up our roots.

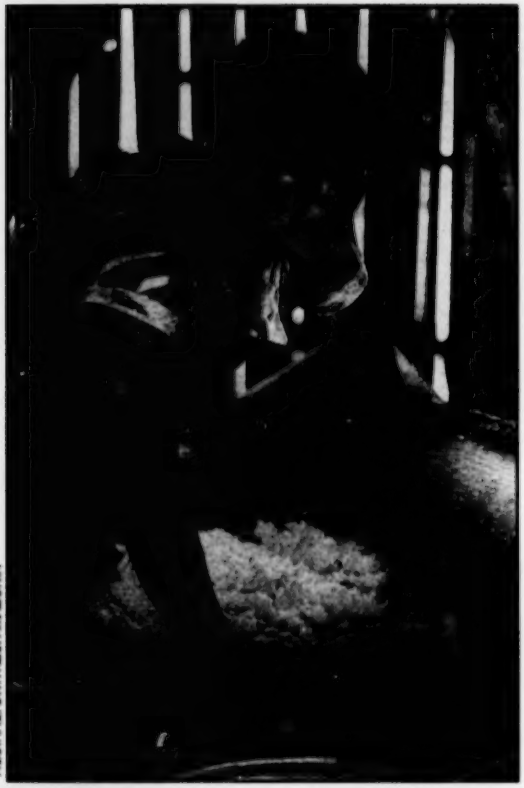
If we are children of Mother Earth, how can we ignore the present and the future, our grandparents and our special grandmother, who have taught us repect for all living things, who have taught us that we are one with the earth and the universe.

The decade of the 1990s has heightened the global crisis, particularly with the pronounced tendency towards privatization, external debt, and the giveaway of resources from remote areas of the earth to transnational interests. In the midst of this giveaway, we, the Indigenous peoples, are most affected, and with this the structure of our families and communities is also suffering.

The role of the Indigenous woman remains fundamental at this critical time as a dynamic being in the preservation of historic and cultural values and economies of self-sustaining development, which for thousands of years prevented the global ecological crisis with which humanity is now confronted.

This ecological crisis is more profound than the economic and political crises. It is economic in terms of its depletion of surface and underground resources, but at the same time it goes beyond economics in terms of its potential to affect our ability to reproduce human and natural existence in the next century.

This situation is already so grave that many Indigenous peoples in Venezuela and America are seeing their own resources being drained—the devastation of the forests, the water, the fish and game, and the destruction or expropriation of agricultural lands. This profound ecological crisis puts us in imminent danger of ethnocide.



AGUIRRE/SWITCES/AMAZONIA

Tukana woman straining manioc flour, Brazil

Emergency Situation of the Anu

In Venezuela, we can take as an example the situation of emergency in which the Anu people of the Laguna de Sinamaica are living. Due to ecological disequilibrium caused by public and private development projects, the *laguna* is filling up with sediments, the level of contamination has increased, and with it the progressive malnutrition of the people caused by the destruction of the fish, which is the principal source of food for these people who live in palafite houses on the water.

The Anu culture is fundamentally a culture which lives from the water rushes; there is a reed which grows in the water and from which they make roofs, matting, and different types of basketry which are theirs alone. The traditional work of cutting the rushes under difficult conditions in the waters of the bog is done by the Anu women, who also used to work as weavers.

This traditional division of work according to age and sex has suffered in recent years due to lack of economic compensation for the women and the Anu families, which has adversely affected their quality of life and purchasing power.

Replanting Education and Training

The problem of Indian women cannot be viewed in isolation. It is particularly important that our culture be revalued, without losing the collective vision of policies for women and Indian families. We must rethink education and training in the light of our historical and cultural interests as distinct peoples.

Therefore, we recommend that political organizing by women and Indigenous families be accompanied by an education focus which permits us to regain our traditional forms of education and family life. This political work must also be accompanied by training, education, and empowerment which emphasize the process of the liberation of our people and of women in particular.

Renilda Martinez, Wayúu, represented the National Indian Council of Venezuela (CONIVE) and the Indian Movement for National Identity (MOIIN) at the Second International Conference of Indian Women in Norway, 1990.

"Empowerment means rebuilding our nations."

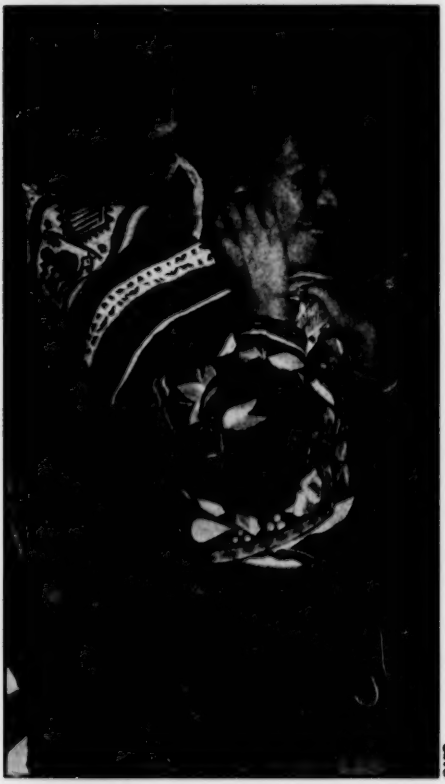
Wara Alderete, Calchaquí

The marginalization, violation, and exploitation of Indian women began with the European invasion of the continent in 1492. If we try and understand how this process of "disempowerment" took place, we might be able to determine what steps we need to take to reverse the situation and become empowered again.

Throughout 500 years of invasion, the Indian people of the American continents have suffered different forms of genocide and ethnocide, from military campaigns of extermination to the attempts of cultural assimilation into the dominant national societies—the colonial societies.

The social, economic, and political structures of traditional Native communities were disrupted to different degrees, depending on the level of penetration of the colonial society. The role of men and women, family life itself, was deeply changed in most communities.

In Andean communities, the role of mother and wife is probably the most important for a woman and is also a highly regarded activity, but it is certainly not the only one. Andean women also are involved in the economy and take care of the assets of the family. If the family is involved in agriculture, for example, the men plow the earth, the women sow the seeds, and in many cases, women are the collectors of the food and are also the ones who take it to market to sell or exchange. Women also take care of the livestock, weave, make crafts, and commercialize these products.



That is why Andean women carry their children on their backs—because they have many activities, and they bring their children along wherever they go. And we move around a lot! Having active participation makes it possible for them to share in decision-making power within the community and also within the family.

For the Indian people of what was once the Tawantinsuyo, the Inca confederation of Indian nations, men and women have equal rights and duties within the community. Our ideology is dominated by the dual perception of life; there is not one creator as in the patriarchal Christian religion. Instead the figures of the

Creators are personalized by a man and a woman, *Manco Kapaj* and *Mama Ocllo*, who emerged from Lake Titicaca, both at the same time; each had their own qualities and tasks. They were both wise and went on to populate the land and pass their knowledge on to their children. Men and women were different, even opposed, but they are complementary, not antagonistic. This concept is a reflection of the duality present in nature, where forces like day and night, the sun and moon, summer and winter, fire and water, complement each other to maintain the harmony of the universe.

Disruption by Colonization

However, this social structure has been disrupted by 500 years of colonization. Today, priests have arrived in almost every community, bringing the teachings of the Christian religion. This religion puts women into a position of servitude and obedience. Many communities have lost their traditional forms of production and their economies. This means they lost their self-sufficiency. In these cases, the members of the community have to become a part of the labor force of the colonial country. As a result, Indian women live in a situation of oppression imposed by patriarchal society. Indian women perform the least rewarded activities; they work as servants in the houses of white people, in factories, or in the fields. Education is denied to most of us.

Because of the tremendous oppression, many Indian women are not even aware of their rights as human beings. As a consequence they suffer much more abuse on the part of society in general and by their own family and husbands. Domestic violence is a serious problem. This abuse is considered "normal" by the men and finally accepted as normal by the women too. Children learn this in their homes, and thus the cycle of violence

is perpetuated. The very moral values of our people have been deeply affected by the imposition of colonial values. Men are most susceptible to taking up the vices of the colonizer. Indian women are stronger, more responsible, and hold to our own moral values, since women's roles as educators have been to maintain the traditions, the culture, and way of living. Women have to face caring for the family by themselves when the men become alcoholics or when they abandon their children or homes.

Military Repression

Indian women in South and Central America are also suffering military repression. Their husbands, sons, and brothers are being killed. Women and orphans are left without any means of support or means of survival, and an increasing number of cases of killings, torture, and disappearance and violations of Indian women and children are being reported. This military repression is, because of its intensity and duration, a cultural aggression against Indian people. What this means is that there are racist sectors in these societies that consider the Indian a symbol of backwardness, a shame for the country. These parts of society think that the Indian should be destroyed so that the country can become "modernized" and developed. We must not forget that Indians still hold productive lands or land which has a considerable amount of natural resources. This is also a great incentive for the destruction of Indian people.

The empowerment of Indian women means the reaffirmation of our identities, of the values of our culture and traditions. It means becoming aware of our rights, acquiring skills, and access to education. It means the end of military repression and the reaffirmation of our rights to land and self-determination as Indian

people. Empowerment means rebuilding and developing our nations.

Training for Leadership

The Indian women of South and Central America who are working in Indian organizations are very much aware of the needs of women in the communities and organizations. What we need to evaluate are those practical and concrete actions which are necessary to bring power back to Indian women, whether it be within our organizations or our communities.

Indian women need to be organized, to be trained as leaders and organizers. Indian women need to be trained in skills that will allow them to confront and change the cycle of economic exploitation, and to be informed of resources available to them at different levels, including internationally, so that they can get economic support. Indigenous women need to be informed and become part of the network of solidarity organizations at an international level. Indigenous women need economic and technical support to carry out their self-development efforts.

We need to be aware that there is a net outflow of millions of dollars per year from South and Central America to the United States and other countries. This money represents our blood and sweat, the work of our people, our women, and our oppression. It would be fair if, through the work of progressive people of North America, some of this money went back to support work towards empowering our communities.

Wara Alderete, Calchaqui, Argentina
Source: Indigenous Women's Network: "Indigenous Woman", Spring, 1991.

"We have survived due to our strong sacred tradition."

Juana Vasquez, Zapoteca

Indigenous peoples of Oaxaca and Mexico have struggled to maintain a certain degree of community self-determination. This gives us dignity as men and women and protects us from the usurpation of our territories and gives us the possibility to control our own destiny.

None can deny that in 500 years of exploitation and constant oppression that which is unique to Indigenous communities has all been but erased and buried forever. This has happened not only in Oaxaca but in all the Americas. Nevertheless, our enemies have failed. As we near the end of the 20th century, we Indian people are regaining the strength and courage to defend and reclaim our dignity and identity.

Consequences of 500 Years of Colonialism

In Mexico, we Indigenous women are still suffering the consequences of 500 years of colonialism, of economic exploitation, cultural domination, marginalization, and social discrimination. We are confronting a strong power structure, maintained by men who hunger for gold and who transform their will into laws, making justice into a business. As a consequence, many of our women and children become victims, deprived of our rights to own land, the use of our forests and mines, our Indigenous systems of justice, education, health, and communication.

We Indigenous women have survived due to the strong, sacred tradition which is our heritage passed on to us by our ancestors. The *Zapoteca* women of *Yalalag* have a system known as *El Tequio*, the center of all community traditions, in which women, men, children, and the elderly participate. Unfortunately, politicians have institutionalized the *Tequio* as a strategy to impose government programs and regulations on Indigenous communities.

Zapoteca women of *Yalalag* are not indifferent to all these problems. We are involved in the enduring task of searching for solutions. We have woven our own history and continue weaving it, impregnated by great ideals which are nurtured by life's daily events and with strong effort and sacrifice.

"We understand and share feelings
with other communities of the world
which are struggling for popular freedom
and women's liberation."

Women's Activism

The incorporation of *Yalalteca* women into the political struggle was significant. We have been participating quietly and humbly. On December 24, 1980, for the first time in the history of our community, more than 400 women began to consciously and vociferously participate in the struggle for community self-determination. We formed our own system of defense: The Union of Yalalteca Women.

On December 31, 1981, the union participated actively in political negotiations. In our first mass mobilization, most of our people journeyed first to the city of Oaxaca and then on to Mexico City. This helped us to overcome our fear of the authorities. It was

at this time that we realized that we were facing not only local leaders, but also the official party, corrupt politicians, and others in government. We recognized that we have to fight against many enemies.

In order to consolidate the process of democratic struggle, one of our first actions was to take control of our schools. Education in Indigenous towns is linked to productive work. We introduced programs to study our language, culture, and traditional production in order to become more self-sufficient. We became more conscious of our own history. For these purposes we created a Community Development Project.

After ten years, we have democratically elected municipal authorities. The community of *Yalalag* is achieving its goals, and we are all participating.

Reclaiming Traditions

After examining these long and hard struggles the *Yalalteca* women have endured, we know that Indigenous women can contribute greatly to transform the economic, political, religious, and cultural conditions of our society. This is our contribution to our future generations.

We have reflected upon our situation and have concluded that as women we are living in a very important period in history, because we have begun to re-evaluate our Indigenous cultures and reclaim our rights to preserve and develop them. In Oaxaca, with the spiritual strength of *Centeol* (the Corn Goddess) and of our ancestors, we are re-evaluating Indigenous philosophy.

We understand and share feelings with other communities of the world which are struggling for popular freedom and women's liberation.

Sadly, life for women in Oaxaca and in Mexico is hard, bitter, and tragic, but this does not mean that we Indigenous peoples have lost the struggle. In fact, in the last 500 years, we have lost many battles. However, we are privileged in that the roots of our community go very deep and are sprouting. It is this spiritual strength which helps men and women to search for our true liberation.

We are concerned that certain Indian leaders, involved with organizations at the international level, are not adequately representing our communities. We Indigenous women must avoid supporting representatives which are based on personal interest. We propose overhauling these international organizations so that they can be of use to our Indigenous communities.

To conclude, we Indigenous women have a long and difficult road to follow. It is a rough path because we are immersed in alien economic and political structures.

For the respect of self-determination for
Indigenous peoples,
For the dignity of Indigenous women,
For the solidarity of Indigenous women
all over the world.

Juana Vasquez Vasquez, Union of Jalalteca Women, Oaxaca, Mexico

Cachiquel Maya widows, Solola Guatemala

"We are trying to find one more tortilla for our children."

For some years, we in Guatemala have been suffering a cruel repression, and thousands of us have been left widowed because our husbands and other family members were kidnapped, disappeared, assassinated, and massacred.

Also, thousands of us widows have lost our husbands to sickness and other causes. Many of them got sick working on the coffee, sugar cane, and cotton plantations, all because they wanted to earn a few *centavos*. The salary that they earned didn't even serve to make them well, much less to give them strength through good

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nutrition. There were cases where we had to sell our little plots of land and our animals but still couldn't cure them.

We who are widowed by repression and sickness and we mothers who have been abandoned and are in need have to work on the plantations with our children on our backs, with tears and great sadness and suffering. To earn a few *centavos* for our sustenance, we have seen our children die of hunger and illness. With each passing day, our situation gets worse.

Returning to our villages, we are accused of being bad women, and we are threatened and followed. This is what we receive instead of consolation and a little tranquility. If we only eat *tortillas* with salt and herbs, it hurts and moves us to hear the cries of our children who suffer so, to see them with stomach pains, with fever, with back pain and eye pain, swelling from malnutrition, and to not even be able to buy them an aspirin. We are now buying corn. Everything has gone up in price, and this year there was no harvest because we were not able to even buy a little fertilizer for our field This leads us to think, what will be our children's future?

Getting Together to Look for Solutions

All this has led to our talking amongst ourselves, to our getting together to begin to think how we are going to look for solutions to meet our needs. That is how we started to form our groups, committees, and other forms of organization in our villages. We are trying to find one more *tortilla* for our children.

Despite all we have suffered and the great effort to get together to look for solutions, we are always meeting obstacles from local and regional authorities. We have also been treated unjustly and been lied to, tricked, and slandered by the government.

No matter what we do, we receive no help. In some places

they give a little bit, but only on the condition that we don't go to demonstrations and with the threat that we stop seeking information about our husbands that have disappeared.

This is the reason we have organized—to resolve our problems, defend ourselves from the abuses we suffer, and so that they will let us live in peace.

National Coordination of Widows of Guatemala
(CONAVIGUA)
Source: Coordinadora Nacional de Viudas de Guatemala
(CONAVIGUA), 1988

AGUIRRE/SWITKES/AMAZONIA

Market woman, Peru

"We continue to advance toward our autonomy."

Ana Llao, Mapuche

Our peoples have had to face tremendous oppression and discrimination in Chilean society for many centuries. This oppression heightened during the sixteen and a half years of the fascist military dictatorship which governed our country, and is a result of the invasion of our continent by the Spanish Empire under the pretext of civilization. This invasion is now celebrating its 500 years of triumph, which we categorically reject. Thus Chile has not been exempt from the havoc and destruction that the native peoples of this continent have suffered.

The policies implemented by the Chilean state toward our aboriginal peoples have resulted in real ethnocides. It is enough to point out that since the Chilean state was formed in 1810, they have imposed more than 100 laws upon us, all with the aim of destroying and dividing our communities and putting an end to our harmonious coexistence, an end to our culture, our traditions, in sum, an end to our People.

The policies imposed by the Chilean government have not limited themselves to reducing our lands. The government has planned large economic and technological development projects on our reduced territory with the purpose of destroying us definitively. All of this is done under the pretext of progress and development of the State and society, without even considering the fate of our communities and their inhabitants, and in many cases destroying the ecology and the environment in which we live.

We Mapuche women possess a very special history. Whether in times of peace or times of war, we always stood beside our male *compañeros*. Thus, for example, we the women of this generation remember with pride our great women military leaders—Janequeo, Fresia, Tegualda, Guacolda, and so many others—who did not hesitate to take up arms to combat the Spanish invaders.

The concrete difficulties we face today are:

a) Racial discrimination on all levels.

b) The greatest illiteracy rates in Chile are found among Mapuche women.

c) The greatest infant mortality rates in Chile are found among Mapuche children, where the mortality rate is 45 children under one year of age out of each 1000 deaths, while in other sectors of society it is 10 infants per 1000.

d) There is a massive migration to large cities due to joblessness.

e) In the 9th region, 75 out of every 100 domestic servants are Mapuche women.

In spite of the difficult circumstances we find ourselves in, we continue to advance towards the creation of our own autonomy as Mapuches, where we as Mapuche women make a strong contribution.

Towards this end, we are creating a large movement of women on a national level, and we want to work closely with others on an international level as well. Thus we will be able to have our rights respected and make significant advances towards our true emancipation.

Long live the Mapuche women of Chile!

Excerpts from a statement by Ana Llao, Mapuche from Ad Mapu (Temuco, Chile) at the Second International Women's Conference, Norway, August 5-9, 1990.

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LYNNA WEDIN

Salasaca woman, Ecuador

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"Unity among women may serve as an example for men."

National Coordinating Committee of Bolivian Indian Women

With the goal of unifying Indigenous women of Bolivia, we have created the National Coordination of Indigenous Women of Bolivia.

This unity among women may serve as an example for the organizations of men, both in unions and popular movements of *Aymaras, Quechuas, Urus,* and others, so that they may also become united at the national level in the future to form a single force of the exploited majority of this country.

For us, the year 1992 is important, since we are preparing to bury five centuries of darkness—of exploitation, oppression, discrimination, and marginalization. And, we are also preparing to strengthen our original people and enter a "new age," *Pachacutl,* where the children will return to recoup their power and territories.

To accomplish this, we have set up the following activities:

1. Seminars and workshops on ways of interpreting the national reality, the problems of Indigenous women, of women and the environment, history, and other matters;

2. To implement means of communication between organizations of Indigenous women. These include radio, bulletins, letters, and posters;

3. We finally are realizing a National Meeting of Indigenous Women, so we may sign an agreement of unity among *Aymara,*

Quechua, Uru, Guarani, Moxeño, and *Movima* women to create a National Coordinating Committee of Indigenous Women of Bolivia.

4. From the unity of women, we are creating a proposal of policies for action for the Indigenous and labor organizations in Bolivia.

Networks of Bolivian Women's Organizations

This proposal is ours and will be carried out by our Indigenous organizations. We will work in coordination with the National Association of Radio and Communication in Native Languages of Bolivia (ANRCINB).

The following organizations are taking part:

CDIMA (Aymara Women's Center for Ideological Discussion) is composed of Aymaras working in social communication. Its objective is to strengthen information, training, and unity among Indigenous organizations, particularly those of women. CDIMA

SMC

Kuna woman speaking on community radio

produced a seminar and debate on the problems of Indigenous women, which was broadcast on radio, and a seminar on the 500 Years. They publish a bulletin called "Panel." They also organized the Encounter of Aymara Women Leaders to discuss the themes of history and unity.

OMAK (Organization of Aymara Women of Kollasuyu) has worked intensively to train Aymara women in La Paz state through 25 centers which it has set up. Its work is to train women in technical and social work. OMAK produces a national radio program in the Aymara language.

CMIB (Center of Indigenous Women of the Beni) was born in 1989. OMIB was greatly strengthened by the "march for dignity and territory" realized by the Center of Indigenous Peoples of the Beni (CPIB). CMIB is made up of the following Indigenous peoples of eastern Bolivia: *Moxeños, Sirionós, Chimanes, Yuracarés,* and *Movimas.* It is part of CPIB and CIDOB (Indigenous Confederation of eastern Bolivia). Its objective is to work for the training of its members and in the struggle for dignity and territory.

FNMCB"BS" ("Bartolina Sisa" National Federation of Campesina Women of Bolivia) is a union organization, uniting *Aymara, Quechua,* and other campesinas of Bolivia. It is affiliated with the Main Workers Union Confederation of Campesinos of Bolivia (CSUTCB) and the Central Bolivian Union (COB). Created in 1980, its objective is to work in the interest of campesina women.

MP-AIGACAA (Women Shepherds of the Andes) is an organization of shepherd women who raise llamas and alpacas on the Bolivian altiplano. Its objective is to work for social and economic development among shepherd families.

National Coordinating Committee of Bolivian Indian Women
Contact: Alicia Canaviri, CDIMA; Andrea Flores, OMAK; or Carmen Pereyra, CMIB

CULTURE AND COMMUNITY SELF DEVELOPMENT

"The seeds of the creation"

Fany Avila, Kuna

Traditionally, Kuna women work a lot. In each community, we learn many things. We know how to cleanse our communities to prepare for ceremonies. If you don't work one day, the chief tells you you have to work twice as hard the next day. If the woman is pregnant, then she doesn't have to work because she needs the rest. But other than this, she is organized to work in the community, and when it's time to make *chicha* for ceremonies, the women have to work just as hard as the men.

Our organization has grown out of the problems that Kuna women have in selling their handicrafts, their *molas*. Our problems are with middlemen, with the ***guagua***, which is what we call non-Indians. In 1985, 20 or 30 of us women got together to organize ourselves, and we began a handicrafts project. At first, we worked just with Kunas living in Panama City. Now we have 300 women taking part who live on different islands. So there are ten communities in which we are working and one woman who is in charge in each community. There they discuss their problems, and my role is to coordinate this work.

The first obstacle we had to confront was that Kuna women don't speak Spanish. Those of us who are younger and who have studied know how to speak Spanish, but the elders don't. So, we had to solve this problem, so that those women who don't speak Spanish could be heard through us. We can translate what they are thinking and what they want to say.

Marketing Traditional Crafts

Before, the *mola* wasn't an object of commerce. Our economy was based more on coconuts and fish. The *mola* wasn't so well known, because it was for the personal use of the Indian woman. This is the everyday dress of the Kuna woman. So it was known mostly within the community.

Today, it's the intermediaries, who don't do any of the work, who are promoting the *molas*. The government even started its own brand, which made a lot of people aware of what the *mola* is. Since they have so much money, they created such a large project that today the *mola* is very commercialized. But as a result, we lost

Fany Avila at UNCED conference, Rio de Janeiro

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some of the sense of some of our own geometric designs. The government wants to produce more *molas*, but without our traditional designs. They don't pay enough for the work that women are doing, because it's a lot of work, very tiring. They are the ones that are making the most from our work.

At first, we were part of the Kuna organization *Nabguana*, which includes men and which has as one of its goals finding how women can more fully participate within the organization. Since this was already their stated goal, we didn't have a problem in doing our work as women. Non-Indian women have also been organizing, and perhaps that is why today the *guaguas* appear to be more ready to listen to what Indian women have to say.

Today, the *mola* is the economy of the community, because the women know that people come from the capital to buy them. This helps us with the education of our children, so we can buy uniforms and books, we can buy food from the outside, and don't have to depend just on our husbands. We can take care of ourselves.

Women's Mola Workshop

We call our project the Kuna Women's Workshop of *Molas* "Kikadiryai." This name is the name of the first woman who started to make *molas*. These stories are hardly told anymore. Those who buy our *molas* try to put a Kuna name on them, but we want a law that says they can't do that. These are only for the Kunas. And only the Kunas have the right to use a Kuna name. Women who are not Kuna don't know how to make them, and we won't teach anybody, because that would be our loss.

The *molas* are made of cotton for export. For us to work with cotton is much more difficult work than with other fabrics. There are those who use other material, but it's not the same. The colors

are traditional, because we always used loud colors, colors that are more alive, that are stronger.

We want to sell them without intermediaries to other countries, so we are working for ourselves, for our communities, and for our children without making the *guaguas* rich. In the future, we want there to be more participation by Indigenous women and Kuna women in international meetings, so that Kuna women can be heard internationally. They should have experience not only here in Panama, but in other women's organizations as well.

Fany Avila is coordinator of the project for the commercialization of traditional molas of the Kikadiryai Kuna Women's Workshop, Panama.

AGUIRRE/SMITKEB/AMAZONA

Ecuadorian market woman

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"This legacy of our ancestors is something we do not want to lose."

Our craft cooperative was formed in 1986. At that time we didn't know anything about what it meant to form a cooperative, we simply felt it necessary to join together. In reality, we already were working together. Our shop had existed for more than 15 years, and people used to come together here in order to display their products. When we began talking about forming a cooperative, the objective was to turn making crafts into a means of making a living. There are many artisans who cannot work because the necessary materials don't exist.

We try to preserve what is native to our region. All of the artisans are local, from neighboring areas. Our crafts consist primarily of weavings, but we also work with baskets made of *simbol* and *poleo* (local plants) and wood and leather, and there are also several potters. We use traditional techniques and natural dyes. All kinds of weavings are made—tapestries, ponchos, blankets, *puyos* (ponchos woven of thick wool), carpets, pullovers, stockings, and shawls.

This legacy of our ancestors is something that we don't want to lose. They didn't know about synthetic dyes. They wove with the materials they had at hand, and this is what we want to preserve. Natural dyes are very consistent and cheaper too.

Locally, we are developing a plan to supply the materials needed for the creation of our crafts. We have bought raw materials, wool, and looms. We have 42 members. We have grown

considerably. The main problem right now is commercialization, because we still don't have a market. At the present time, we are only selling locally. What we would like to be able to do is, for example, to go to expositions, to go to other areas in order to sell our things.

Josefa Balderrama , President; Rumaldo Olivar, Secretary, Cooperativa Pachamama, Calchaquí Valley, Tucuman, Argentina. Source: "Norte Andino."

"I left my village so I could live better."

Inés de Lima Dias, Tukana

I left my village when I was 29 years old and went to *São Gabriel* to make some money, so that I could live better, buy clothes, shoes, and everything. Since I've come from the interior, I have lived with the same family. My job doesn't pay any salary. I do this work just to get by, to have a place to live.

Some women from my village were brought here by military people on air force planes. Others came with missionaries. The majority don't receive any salary and don't have the papers you need to get a job. They also have to search for other work in people's houses as domestic workers. Here, life is very difficult for the women. Some are sick and get no medical care. We don't know how many have turned to prostitution.

Our Association began when Janet, an American anthropologist, bought this house for Indian women in 1984, because she saw that those who left their jobs didn't have anywhere to live. In 1986, we had a meeting with the women, and we started to sell handicrafts. We now have meetings every month and an annual assembly. Only women are in the association. Some Indian men who have experience in Indian organizations take part in meetings, to explain things and give their opinions. That helps. We have links with COIAB here in Manaus and 32 other organizations upriver.

About 70 women take part regularly, but there must be 500 others who have been involved. Most are *Tukana*, and we also have *Desana, Tuyuca, Piratapuia, Tariana, Baniwa, Wanana, Murititapuia, Arapassa*, and others. When the women leave one job, they stay here while they look for a new one. Many are very young girls.

We have trouble getting money to maintain the expenses of the house. We have to pay electricity, water, and the telephone. On weekends, we work making handicrafts. We weave bags and if there are a lot of people working, we can also make hammocks and baskets.

But we have no place to sell them, and it's also difficult getting the materials we need, which come from the interior. We work with our original *tucum* fiber, which we get from people from the *Solimões* or *Negro Rivers*. We also have to order cotton thread from *Belém*. Right now there's no way to buy these things.

Inés de Lima Dias, Tukana, is coordinator of the Numiã-Kuruã Association of Women of the Upper Rio Negro, Brazil, which assists Indian women who are unemployed or ill in Manuas.

"Will it be only men who enter into politics?"

Severiá Idiorie, Karajá Javae

In some communities where the contact was greater, there were women who retained their tradition of speaking their language but who left for the city to study. Some are now professionals and nurses. Indian women don't view the situation of women the same way that white society does. White women feel they have to fight for their rights and their security, both in their personal and professional lives.

In the 20 years I lived in the city, studying and seeing this other world, I lost much of what I had learned from my community. I'm now 29, going on 30. I can't deny that I miss the city, the cultural things like films and that type of thing. But also, I like living in the village, because it is a completely different type of life. We see that, on the one hand, we can send our children to the city, but on the other hand, they may return completely incapable of living in our society.

The people of my village see me as someone who can work in the world of whites without losing my identity. And also I can explain to the white community what we are thinking, what we want, and where we want to go, and to deal with the intermediaries who say one thing but do another.

Our project is called Jaburu, and we are working to cultivate and find new uses for the Native fruit trees of the cerrado (savanna), as well as in the inventory and management of Native animal species. Women take part in the cultivation, harvest, and

KIT MELLER

Severiá Idorie, Karajá Javae, Brazil

processing of the fruits as they always have.

The way these things are done in white society is something we also have to learn. So for that we need to study, to learn how we can process these fruits for sale.

Karaja Javae and Xavante have been traditional rivals over things like territory, and they fought a lot. Even today, they are still enemies. But within the village, I am not considered an enemy, but as one of the family. There is even a sentiment in the

community that I should participate more in the village life because of my experience in two worlds. Within traditional society, there are spaces which are exclusively for men. But they also invite me as a woman to consult with them on what the best way would be to handle specific questions, which is good.

There are 180 Indigenous groups in Brazil, and 10 isolated groups. There is such a diversity of peoples that you have to look at each situation as something different, even though we all have things in common. So, I think that each of these societies has to look at their situation here in 1992, and take a broad view of how to define their path according to the totality of their situation. From these studies, these groups will know if women will work in medicine or food, as they had before. How will it be now? Will it be only the men who will enter into politics or will women also?

Each community must decide how this will work so that our people can go forward. Even a chief cannot decide that men will do this and women will do that. There needs to be a consensus among the group.

Severiá Idiorie, Karajá Javae is married to a Xavante and works in the Xavante village of Pimental Barbosa coordinating the Jaburu project for community self-development. The community developed this project together with the Center for Indian Research of the Nucleus of Indigenous Culture, Brazil.

"Humankind created ceramics to raise oneself spiritually."

Barbarita La Cruz, potter, Purmamarca, Argentina

Ceramics are for me one of the maximum expressions of humankind. Since ancient times, humankind created ceramics to satisfy primordial necessities and at the same time to raise oneself spiritually. The first kitchen utensils were ceramics, which began to be adorned with representations of things and scenes of daily life. The artist who shaped the mud was inspired by the mother earth *Pachamama:*

> Pachamama holy earth
> this offering I give to you
> this *pucu* made of mud
> burned by the fire.

The origin of my artistic sensibility was in my childhood in the village of Purmamarca, in contact with nature. The proximity of the colorful hills that gave me the gift of my materials and the childhood contemplation of its guinea pigs, *choschoris*, and other animals made possible my first tries at pottery.

From the time I was a girl, I heard legends and stories about the different celebrations and traditional customs of the village, among them that which told of the devil who wandered loose during the days of carnival. This person, according to what they said, pursued the children who played near the Red Hill where he lived. This legend of the grown-ups caused fear in the children.

That's how one Tuesday of *Carnaval*, while I played with some children making designs, the night came upon us. The grown-

ups were dancing and strumming guitars in their friends' homes. Our fear rose as we heard the echoing of the drums in the hills, but we kept working to finish our little figures.

Soon the moon became reflected in the irrigation stream, and looking up toward the hill, I saw the frightening silhouette of the devil, big and red, with enormous horns from which came sparks of fire. With one hand he shook his tail and danced ever closer toward us. I screamed: the devil! This scream was followed by that of my friends as they saw the same thing.

Sheep and goats scattered along the stream. We started running toward the house where the party was taking place. At a corner we ran up against Sulka, a person of the village who was feared by the children. Dressed in clothing of many colors and starched petticoats, she was small and jumped to the beat of an *erquencho*, while she shook a corn plant. This encounter scared us so much that I fainted.

Barbarita Cruz, potter, Purmamarca, Argentina
Source: "Abierto por Balance," courtesy of Nestor Groppa and Buenamontaña Press.

AGUIRRE/SMITKES/AMAZONIA

Shipibo potter, Peru

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"The opportunity to reflect on women's roles"

Miriam Quispe, Kolla

The following are projects of La Minka, an Indigenous development organization in Jujuy, Argentina:

Weaving Workshop

The objectives of the weaving workshop are to:

- improve the quality of life of the families of Tilcara
- integrate women into the development process
- generate income for the participants of the workshop
- create productive organizations

This workshop is run by a group of women who knit sweaters from hand-spun sheep's wool. It offers a source of employment, thus enabling women to earn an income for their homes and families. It also offers a space for them to meet weekly and reflect on the role of women in our society, all too often seen as secondary to that of men. This opportunity to reflect on women's roles is of fundamental importance to the process of transformation.

Community Organizing and Education

There is an on-going community organizing project. This organizing work often takes place in Indigenous communities which are 14 and 15 hours away on mule back through mountainous country.

Once a month, all of those participating in this community-strengthening process meet in one of the communities, in order to evaluate the progress made thus far and to plan new projects. The gatherings that are planned throughout the year include a focus on community organizing, youth, couples, women, land rights, agriculture, herding, and development and marketing of products.

Student Hostel

The objectives of the student hostel project are to:

- offer a place for young people from Indigenous communities to live while continuing their studies
- offer employment opportunities
- prevent the depopulation of the Indigenous communities of the department of Tilcara.

Young people from the more distant communities of the department of Tilcara need a place to stay in order that they may continue their secondary education. To meet this need, a student hostel offering full room and board was opened this year. The hostel is supported by the sale of traditional handicrafts and offers training in the production of these crafts. Thus it enables students from poor families to earn an income.

The crafts that are taught include ceramics, spinning and weaving, natural dyeing, drawing and painting with colored earth, crafting natural tinctures from regional plants, and the confectionery trade.

Canning Workshop for Fruits, Vegetables, and Medicinal Herbs

A small canning factory has been created to process fruits, vegetables, and medicinal herbs. Traditional sweets are made using the agricultural and dairy products of the region.

The sweets that are made are exchanged using the ancient practice of barter. The products of the factory are carried on mule back to the communities and boarding schools, in order to trade for wool, potatoes, hides, and jerky. The communities are also offered advice on animal breeding, eliminating parasites, and building wash troughs for the cows and sheep.

Miriam Quispe (Kolla) is a coordinator of La Minka

GUILLERMO DELGADO/SAIIC

Aymara woman spinning wool with a traditional "pushka"

On Pachamama Day

What is Pachamama?

Pacha means earth and *Mama* means mother. Therefore, *Pachamama* means Mother Earth. Aboriginal or Indigenous peoples (or however we choose to call those who live close to the earth, whether in the mountains or valleys) are always immersed in the connections between Humans, the Sacred, and Nature. Therefore, *Pachamama* is considered the protectress of all that exists.

Why is there a day dedicated to honoring Pachamama?

Because it is necessary to thank her for the fruits of the Earth which make our subsistence possible, as well as for the feeling of being an integral part of her life force or vital vibration.

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How does one worship Pachamama?

First, we respectfully ask *Pachamama* for permission to dig a hole in the Earth. Then as we dig, we do so with the feeling of opening the heart of the Earth. Within the hole we have opened, we place, with our deepest gratitude, the fruits of the Earth that she has given us: various foods, drinks, fruits, tobacco, select coca leaves, and flowers to help the benevolence of our Earth Mother blossom. The sacred leaf of the coca plant is an essential element of this ritual of celebration, although details of the ritual vary from region to region.

Concepción Catunta (Kusikilla) is the director of Jujuymanta Queshwa Institute in Jujuy, Argentina

Mapuche Machi *(spiritual leader) playing the sacred* cultrum *(drum)*

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"Our struggle is double"

Maria Pereyra and Fresia Mellico, Mapuche

In the provinces of Neuquen, there are about 35 communities, the majority of them located in mountainous areas. This is true not because they have chosen these places, but rather because they have been confined there through what occurred in what was called the "Conquest of the Desert," at the same time that the western part of our territory went through the "Pacification of *Araucanía*."

Our existence as Mapuche also extended to other provinces such as Chubut-Rio Negro-La Pampa and Pcia. de Buenos Aires. We will show here some general aspects of the reality of our people and our situation as women here in *Puel Mapu* (Argentina).

The principal activity of our people in the communities is cattle raising, not being able to work the land in other ways since we are restricted to rocky areas where the lands are totally infertile. Currently, our communities are encircled by large ranchers who are mostly Arab-German and English. The running over of our communities has still not ended, because every now and then the ranchers put up barbed wire fences and our people have less and less space to live. Despite this fact, they don't have the right to protest, since according to the laws of Argentina, they are not legal owners of the lands where they live. The consequences of this situation affect not only women, but all those of the community, including youth and elders who have been forced to leave their land for villages and cities and others who work on the ranches where they are greatly exploited and poorly paid.

The role of the woman in the community is fundamental, even if in part of our territory there are no more *Machi*, those women charged with going forward with our prayers along with our elders. She also plays a specific role which is that of the *Pijan Kuse* (old volcano) and in other cases is in charge of singing the *Tayvb* (a personal sacred song) of each family which participates in the ceremony. At home, she is the one who transmits to her children the knowledge about the *Tayvb* in the family. Through them, from the grandmothers, they can observe the original way of wishing a good trip or wishing for a good work, and can accomplish even difficult things.

She is in charge of transmitting to her children, when they still haven't yet been born, all the wisdom which her people have. She has been in charge of maintaining their art through the weavings and sewing. For all these fundamental things the Mapuche women have and still are respected by all segments of society. Such is their knowledge that in some places the woman is the community authority, since they are *Kasicas* in place of a man.

While there exist problems of battered women, *machismo*, and others, we understand that these are not characteristic of our people, rather that, with the coming of the Spaniards, our people not only received the positive elements which they believed would serve them, but were also exposed to the negative things like alcoholism, mistreatment of women, envy, etc., which are all direct products of the colonization.

Ideological Colonization

Apart from those visible problems, there is a more subtle and permanent situation which results from ideological colonization, and that is due to the religious sects, which seem to affect women more. So strong are these consequences that many women do not want to struggle any longer, because supposedly God will compensate them later for the sufferings they go through here on earth. These sufferings are the discrimination they face by whites, both because they are Mapuche and because they are women, when they go to the city and are given the worst of all jobs.

We are clear that this does not happen solely with Mapuche women, and that it happens in a similar way within the poor and peasant sectors of society. However, we must understand that our struggle is double, since we have to struggle for a job with dignity and have to make sure that we are respected as Mapuche women who have our own language, culture, and vision of the world.

We also know that all the elements which make up our way of being Mapuche are difficult to practice in the city, so we lose our identity when we go to places that are inhabited by people of a culture which is foreign to ours, and we are obliged to do things and to think in the same manner as they do. But in recent years, there have emerged proposals for regaining what is ours even though we are in the cities, and this is through our organizations.

As our organizations grow, our identity and the historical development of our people are strengthened. We women have a key role in strengthening the struggle of our people by reviving our authentic values.

Sisters, your struggle is our struggle in the same way as ours is also yours. We would like you to think in this way, not in the formal sense, but as something very real and profound, as you and

we are both Mapuche women who speak *Mapunche Dugun* and who carry out the *Gijañmawvn.*

The *wigka* (white) culture thought it had divided us forever, but we are together as the branches of a great tree, each one from his home united by the same trunk: Our Mapuche People.

Maria Pereyra, Asociación Mapuche Nehuen Mapu, and Fresia Mellico, Agrupación Mapuche Newentuayin, Temuco, Chile

"Even though women in general are marginalized, the situation of Mapuche women is even worse. Looking at statistics, we see that the highest percentage of illiteracy in Chile is among Mapuche women, and that half the women under 25 years of age face the trauma of leaving home and migrating to the cities. There, the only work Chilean society offers is that of domestic workers, work which pays very little and where the woman becomes victim of permanent economic exploitation. With the reduction of communities by 90%, women automatically lose their right to land, a form of legalized and planned discrimination on the part of the government."

Source: Quinturray, Chile

"The most conscious women are the ones who participate and fight with their husbands to try to make them understand. To do this they must be fully aware of the need to participate, that they have the right to do so, that they have to fight it out with their husbands and make them understand that this situation of exploitation, misery, and oppression must be confronted by both of them."

Nelly, mother of 11, Peru
Source: Peru Network; "Women in Peru: Voices From a Decade"

"We've formed our Women's Committee to defend our interests, because we want to defend our rights. As women, we want to be respected by the men. They should at least let us participate freely in different organizations and also let us be leaders too. They tell us that we have formed our committee because we want to get out of the kitchen. But that's not true. We want to get things done, like real people, just like the men."

Presentación, Puno, Peru
Source: Peru Network; "Women in Peru: Voices From a Decade"

"Our life is that of a slave"

Doña Alejandrina, Quechua

I am a campesina woman who lives in Pocpocollo, Cochabamba department, Bolivia. My neighbors and friends call me Aleja. I am 35, the third of six children. I was still very young when I was orphaned.

My father was very wicked. Each time that he came home drunk and beat my mother, we were frightened and hid from him. One time, he kicked and punched my mother a lot while she was pregnant, and she fell to the ground and couldn't get up. She was bleeding and said her stomach hurt. Because of this beating she miscarried. She never recovered, and one month later she left us forever when she died.

So, my father didn't know what to do, and he cried along with us. All the neighbors said that he was bad, because he always hit my mother, and that it was his fault that we had lost her.

I was 16 when my grandparents on my mother's side took me and my younger brothers and sisters to live with them, leaving my father behind. My father suffered much and drank a lot of *chicha* (corn beer) every day. He didn't work and cried when he remembered my mother.

"If I didn't work like a burro,
my children would die of hunger."

Hard Work

We helped with the planting and harvest of flowers to try to earn some money. I went to sell flowers in Cochabamba on Saturdays and Wednesdays, earning a little money to buy bread and provisions, so I was always able to cook for and feed my brothers and sisters. Before, there had been times when we didn't have anything to eat, because my father didn't bring anything home and went away for days and weeks on end.

My older brothers and sisters began working as bricklayer's assistants to get money for the house. They used the money they earned to buy clothes and gave me money for supplies. That's how we lived for a long time.

WARA ALDERETE/SAIIC

Kolla woman at the militarized Argentina/Bolivia border

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I married my husband when I was 19. He is a bricklayer and drinks just as much as my father. He beats me a lot and doesn't want to give me money for anything, so I have to scrape together what I can get. So, all the *cancha* days I go to Cochabamba to sell produce like carrots, chard, spinach, beets, parsley, pumpkins, and onions. Every Saturday and Wednesday, I have to get up at four in the morning to pick the vegetables that I will sell. I earn very little, but there's always something left over to cook. I have five kids. The youngest, who is four months old, goes with me, but it is difficult to do things with the baby. I don't want to have any more children, because life is so difficult for the little ones, and money is hard to come by. My children are in school and need materials, clothes, and shoes, and I can't buy everything they need.

When my husband gets drunk, he hits me a lot, yells at me, and mistreats me. Then he tells me 'why do you have so many kids' and not to bother him by asking for money. The only thing he wants is to have his food brought to him at work at the time when he wants it. To take his lunch I have to walk a lot or take a *trufi*.

When he picks up his pay on Saturdays, my husband goes straight to the bar with his friends and returns home late at night drunk, and hits me without having any respect for my children. He doesn't want to give me anything. He's inconsiderate, stingy, and has money only for *chicha*. If I didn't work like a burro selling in the *cancha*, my children and I would die of hunger. Many times I have thought of leaving, but what would I do with so many children?

Doña Alejandrina, Bolivia
Source: CETM-AQUI from "Lawray 'Chispa' Suplemento Femenino," June 14, 1991

"The woman is called upon to play a decisive role."

Lacking land and conditions for a dignified life, women leave for the cities to work as domestic workers and suffer the abuse of their bosses. Both in the country and in the cities, when we go out to sell our products, we are treated badly. The people don't let the women on the bus, and at the market we are insulted, stared at, pushed, and are not paid a fair price for products.

When women organize to reclaim their rights and protest against mistreatment and abuses of authorities, they are not given importance, and their complaints are laughed at and brushed off. But these problems that the Indian women suffer do not only affect us here, but all those who live in this society, and we as members of the Indigenous movement ECUARUNARI have to look for solutions.

Today, the woman is called upon to play a decisive role in the struggle and the resistance that has been maintained for 500 years. A way of contributing to this struggle is to participate in community meetings to strengthen the regional and national organizations. In this context, we will go to look for solutions to the rising prices of clothing, of transportation costs, of taxes, of light and water.

Ecuarunari, Ecuador

Source: Ecuarunari: "Riccharishum, Que se oiga la voz de las mujeres indígenas del Ecuador," September, 1991

"Caught between two fires."

Amnesty International

Women who stand up for their rights are under threat in Peru's human rights crisis and are particularly vulnerable in the emergency zones. Since the state of emergency was declared in 1982, women have found themselves subject to an increasing number of grave abuses.

In a largely agricultural society, all hands are needed to earn a living from the land. Yet few men between the ages of 14 and 45 remain in the conflict areas. An estimated one-third of women are widowed, and many more displaced. Responsibility for working the land, caring for livestock, maintaining the home, and bringing up large families rests largely with the women. The destruction of normal community life in many areas has created severe difficulties and hardships.

Women have become more vociferous in defending their rights. Many have set up groups for training in health, literacy, and vocational skills.

One consequence of this activity is that their leaders risk becoming targets of the security forces. Consuelo Garcia, leader of a miners' wives' training organization, was found dead on the outskirts of Lima in February 1989.

Angelica Mendoza de Ascarza, president of the Association of Relatives of the Disappeared (ANFASEP), has been warned by men who entered her home at night to halt her work or else face death.

In June 1988, troops from the Huanta command sought out community leaders after they had persisted in demands that

disappeared relatives be released from prison. They shot the lieutenant governor and his wife as they slept, seized the local municipal agent, and raped his wife and her 17 year old sister.

As well as facing persecution for membership in trade unions or for their political activities, women of all ages in the emergency zone risk sexual abuse. Members of the security forces appear to be entirely free to abuse women in the course of their counterinsurgency operations or individual actions.

Rape by troops is widespread and routine, and Amnesty International is unaware of any convictions for this crime in the emergency zone. Out of shame or fear of further persecution, only a fraction of rape cases are said to be reported.

Legal officials told Amnesty International representatives visiting Ayacucho in 1986 that rape was to be expected when troops were based in the rural areas. They said it was somehow "natural" and that prosecutions should not be expected.

Source: Amnesty International : "Caught Between Two Fires" (Peru briefing, November 1989)

Aymara woman, Bolivia

Mothergrandmother Payamama

Queshwa version

Mothergrandmother origin
of the world
mother of generations
your sorrows were
my lullabies,
your tears
the water in which I bathed,
your smile
my mirror of joy,
your hair
the toy with which
my fingers played.

Payamama t'ijsimuyujmanta
mama imaypachama
llakikimayki karga
takiy punuyniy
wequeyniki
sapa punchaj anmay
kusi qhespi
asiyniy
phujllana chujllana cuhjchayki
maypi ruqkanay phujllan.

Your sorrows
were wide paths
on which your feet
walked nakedly
towards life's struggles.
The eternal injustices
destroy your soul,
but do not shatter your
woman's strength,
hard as stone,
tender as a butterfly,
pure as a spring.

Llakiyki karga
miqa-nan
maypin k'allchakisiniyki
purin
kausajniykiwan maqanakuj
millay kausay t'aman munaykita.
Mana kallapaykita pakiyta
atinichu
warmi qaqa anakauyi
pillpinto nujnuchay
phijyu ch'innkil

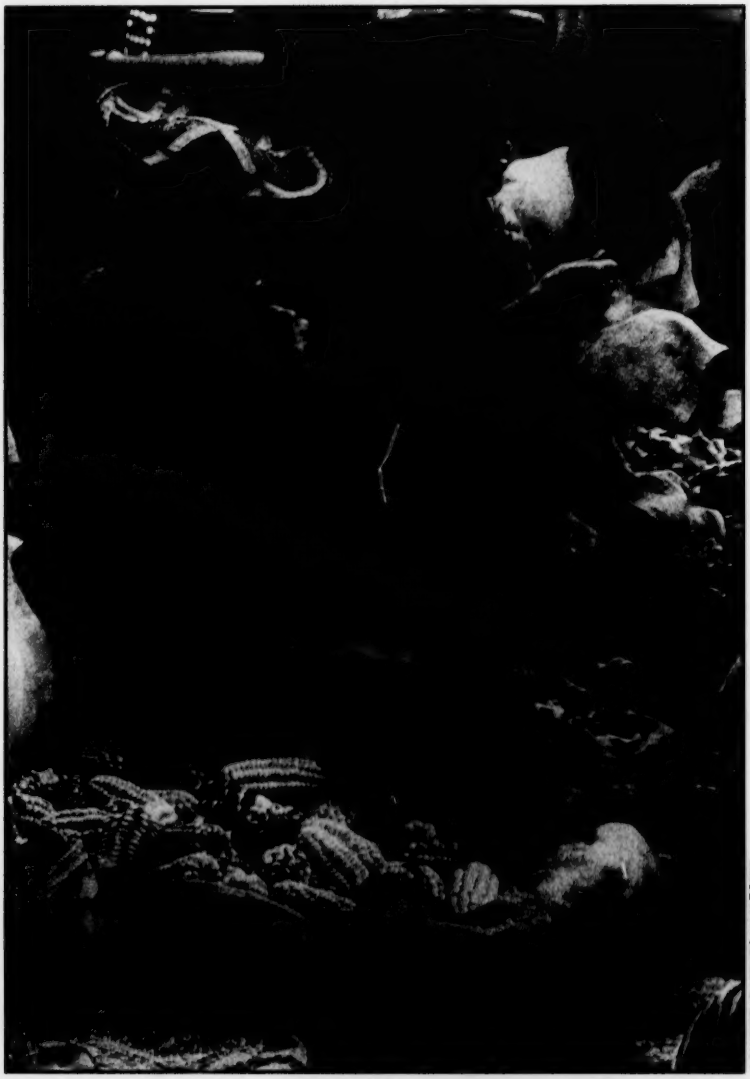
Your portrait
has remained in my heart
and your fighter's strength
in my blood.
I am like you,
mothergrandmother.
I leave behind many like you
and like myself.

Yuyajniypi qan kanki
rimayniyki sonkoypi
sirichina kallpayki
sirkaypi
qan jina kani payamama
saqeni ijkunata qan jina
imayna moqa jina.

Concepción Catunta
Kusikilla
Jujuy, August 1992

When women struggle for fundamental human rights—civil, political, social, economic, and cultural—both as part of a community and as women, they advance the international human rights agenda. The important work of Indigenous women organizing to exercise their fundamental human rights should be supported by human rights and women's organizations everywhere.

Margaret A. Schuler
Institute for Women, Law, and Development



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